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A Game of Gold; or, Deadwood Dick's Big Strike.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "ROSEBUD ROB," "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

A SERMON INTERRUPTED AT BIG BONANZA.

SUNNY and bright was the morning in spring-time, and everything of nature seemed smiling with joyousness. The grass, the foliage, and the forests were green, birds sung in the chaparral their merriest notes, and insects droned lazily through the air, but everything else seemed hushed in the arms of smiling Nature.

Industry and thrift had ceased at Big Bonanza, for the time being, and the jingling of a small bell in the hands of a little urchin who paraded up and down the one main street, seemed to point to the fact that it was Sabbath in Big Bonanza, when all godly disposed pilgrims were invited to gather at the church, and listen to the religion propounded by the Reverend Cinnamon Charley, from Dog City;—or when all evil-minded galoots were privileged to retire to saloons innumerable, to engage in a quiet game of "seven up."

It was strictly a moral town, generally speaking—was Big Bonanza. Some score of families composed the population of the little settlement on the mountain-ridge, save it be a few transient comers or goers, and these families were nearly all "white"—to use the vernacular of the mines.

The mines at Big Bonanza paid all a very moderate remuneration, and that was all that could be said. There was no particular margin for speculation, and consequently Big Bonanza ranked with hundreds of other little strikes of just its kind. It had its store, post-office, and also its cabin-church, and asked for no more, with a large expectation of getting it.

And when Sabbath made its periodic visits, the citizens, with a few exceptions, turned out to hear the Reverend Cinnamon Charles dispense spiritual advice and consolation to the poor and needy.

To-day, we notice a large turnout, and the rude cabin answering as a place of worship, was packed pretty full of pilgrims who had no better employment than to hear the Rev. Chas. Men there were, as rough and unkempt as the wildest mountain-trapper—miners in stogy boots, red shirts with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and various styles of unruly-looking head-gear.

Women there were none. Not only in church, but in the town as well; not one of the gentler sex was there in Big Bonanza, or had ever been there, within the recollection of the oldest inhabitant—nor was there a prospect of any ever coming there, in the bargain.

Some of the miners had families, but they were all boys, whose mothers were dead, or had deserted, and it left Big Bonanza literally a male town.

Being on a main stage line, the floating population was considerable, but no woman or girl ever risked setting foot on the soil of Big Bonanza.

But the stage, to-day, brought a stranger into the town, and he gathered with the other pilgrims at the "meeting-ouse," to listen to the discourse of the Reverend Cinnamon.

He was a handsomely-built fellow of some eight and twenty years, with a full round face, set off to advantage by eyes of steely gray, a heavy brown mustache, and a rather pleasant mouth, while long brown hair fell over his shoulders.

He was dressed in a stone colored suit of clothes, with top boots upon his feet, and a round hat upon his head, with a broad brim. He was, also, well armed; but then that was nothing, for every citizen of Big Bonanza went armed to the teeth, even to the minister.

The first impression of this stranger was apt to be favorable, but, at the second glance, an impression of something dark and sinister, and unrelaxable would take possession of the mind.

On leaving the stage, he sauntered up the main street of the town, and entered the church, to take a seat near the pulpit.

As soon as the congregation had all assembled, the Rev. Cinnamon Charley arose and gave out the text, and began his discourse, which proved that he was better capable of crying for a side-show than preaching the Gospel.

But he elicited frequent applause whenever he hit the risibilities of the crowd, and that was about all that was required by the tastes of the Big Bonanzians.

But, though for many kindred Sabbath days Charles had dispensed Gospel truths without molestation, he was not always to enjoy that peaceful privilege, and to-day proved to be the exception to the monotonous rule.

Half-way buried in the depths of biblical exposition had his reverence got, when the door of the "meeting-ouse" was unceremoniously thrown open, and a band of masked men poured in, headed by a person in black, from top to toe, including the cowl that shielded from view the upper portion of his face.

"Stop!" this leader cried, cocking a handsome pair of revolvers which he held in his grasp. "Please to let up with your sermon, Cap, until we reduce the size of your congregation. Frank Foster, if you are here, you will do well to come forward and surrender."

"Thar's nary a galoot heer, by that name, my friend," the Reverend Charley declared, laying a pair of pistols on the Bible that ornamented his pulpit, and following this act by taking a huge chew of tobacco. "Verily, stranger, thou hast struck the wrong trail."

"No we have not," the first masked man replied, coolly. "There is a man in this congregation, by the name of Foster, whom we have been in pursuit of, for over a week, and whom we are sure of now, as he was seen to enter this church. As soon as we get him, you can go on with your sermon, and maybe you'll have a chance to preach a funeral dialogue, 'fore the day is out."

"Well, that's bizness, anyhow, and ef the galoot's heer, you shall have him," Big Bonanza's ministerial light announced, promptly. "Ah! mebbe the stranger who cum on the stage is your man."

"The very chap," the masked leader said, approaching the seat where the stranger was seated, accompanied by his men. "Ah! Foster, you find yourself hunted down, at last."

The stranger arose to his feet, a perceptible pallor creeping over his face—a baffled curse escaping his lips.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, sternly. "What would you do?"

"We would put you where by treachery you sent ten of your companions," the leader replied, fiercely. Then, turning to the staring congregation he continued:

"Gentlemen, it will not take me long to explain this matter to your entire satisfaction, I think. I am the leader of this band of men, who are known as the Rough-and-Readys—a band whose aim it is to protect themselves and their own interests from the tyranny of the law. I scarcely need mention my own name—you have, many of you, doubtless seen and heard of me. My handle is Deadwood Dick!"

A strange, startled murmur ran through the crowd of assembled Bonanzians, and more than one hand crept involuntarily to a pistol butt. Deadwood Dick saw this, and smiled, faintly.

"Oh! you needn't pull your complimenters," he demurred, lightly, "for I mean you no harm, and besides, my gang numbers larger by half, than your own. What I am after is this traitor here, whose name is Foster. Until about two weeks ago, I supposed him to be one of the most faithful members of my gang, but I finally awoke to his treacherousness, when I found that he had led a squad of my men into the hands of Judge Lynch, for the consideration of two hundred gold dollars. Through his treachery my comrades were strung up, in spite of me, and you may imagine I promised to hunt the faithless miscreant down to death! Laying aside all prejudices you may or may not have against Deadwood Dick, gentlemen, do you consider that I am censurable for tracking the traitor, that would betray his own comrades, down to death?"

"No! no!" agreed a chorus of voices, coming from Big Bonanza's leading citizens.

"Of course not," Rev. Cinnamon Charles replied, with an approving nod. "Death is the only doom fit for a traitor, and I recommend it, whether he be a traitor to humanity or to the Church of Israel."

"I see I've struck one sensible crowd, at least," and Deadwood Dick laughed pleasantly.

"Come, sir traitor! I would not settle with you in a place of worship, but outside, in the free air. Surrender, promptly, for it will avail you nothing to refuse, or waste words."

"This is infamous!" the stranger cried, shrinking back. "You are mistaken in your man. I know you not, nor have I ever known you. Gentlemen, I appeal to you for protection. I

am Donald McFergus, of New York, and not the man these outlaws claim."

"Bah! you lie!" Deadwood Dick replied, sternly. "Don't think to escape in that shabby way, Frank Foster, for it's useless. I know you—the boys know you, to a man. Think you that ever a man served under the flag of Ned Harris whom he did not know? Seize him, boys, and take him to the tavern!"

The order was promptly obeyed. The traitor was seized by a half-dozen pairs of willing hands, and led from the church into the street, followed by the other outlaws, Deadwood Dick bringing up the rear.

"Go ahead with your sermon, parson," he said, as he reached the door, "and pardon my interruption."

"Church is adjourned till ter-night, boyees," Rev. Cinnamon Charley announced. "I'm goin' ter see ther fun!"

This seemed to suit the congregation as well as the parson, and out of the church poured the crowd, bent on "seeing the thing through."

Big Bonanza's chief place of liquid refreshment was the "Tavern," and thither Deadwood Dick's men led the traitor, Foster, followed by their chief, and the Big Bonanzians, too, until the large bar-room of said tavern was packed full, to the door.

Then Deadwood Dick, mounted on a chair near the bar, addressed the audience:

"Gentlemen, I told you the crime of which Frank Foster is guilty, and I need not add that it is my privilege and perhaps my duty, to shoot him on the spot, without mercy. But, this is not my lay. As long as I have been a so-called outlaw, I have, I think, never been guilty of killing even a prairie dog without giving him a chance for his life and liberty; consequently, I propose to give this traitor a like chance—a thing he did not give his comrades, when he sold them to Judge Lynch. But, in doing this, I do it on my own responsibility. My followers shall not be cheated out of their vengeance on the murderer of their comrades, and if Frank Foster escapes a merited death, Deadwood Dick will step forward and fill the bill!"

A murmur of astonishment escaped the Big Bonanzians and the Rough-and-Readys, but the Prince of the Road smiled strangely, and continued:

"I mean it," he said, "and will tell you precisely how. As we rode into this mountain camp, this morning, I observed that the southern side is bordered upon a frightful abyss, of considerable width and unknown depth. Across this abyss to the mountains on the opposite side is stretched a wire cable, used for hauling an ore-bucket across the said abyss. Now, it is my plan to throw dice with Frank Foster, to see which of us walks that cable across the abyss, without balance-pole, and with hands tied behind the back. If the man Foster throws a better band of dice than I, he is a free man, and at liberty to depart, while I am to risk my life as before described, by attempting to cross the abyss by the cable. If I throw the best game of dice, said Foster must walk the cable, and run the same risk. In case he reaches the other side in safety, he has earned his liberty, and canceled his debt to my band. Comrades, you have heard me—what do you say? Shall it be as I have announced?"

"Ay!" "Ay!" "Ay!" came the response of many voices in one. "All hail to our commander! Three cheers for Deadwood Dick!"

Deadwood Dick then turned to Foster, who was held in durance, close by.

"Frank Foster, traitor, you have heard the two chances I have given you for your life and liberty. What thanks have you to offer?"

"None!" the betrayer replied, with a scowl. "I am ready to accept your proposition, but do not feel inclined to thank you for a liberty I shall fail to gain."

"If I were you, I should feel grateful for even so small a chance," Deadwood Dick replied. "But, come! I have no time to waste in talk. Barkeeper, be kind enough to set out the dice, and we will decide this matter as quickly as possible."

The dice and cup were placed upon the counter, and the two contestants took their places.

"What will you have it?" Harris demanded, pushing the cup to the traitor. "I leave you to make the choice."

"One flop, with horses, will suit me, very well," Foster replied, savagely. "Shall I lead off?"

"Yes, if you like. I am not at all particular."

With a perceptible nervousness Foster seized the cup, and shook the dice to and fro in a short quick jerk, a strange pallor upon his face, and a wild, hopeful glitter in his eyes.

To and fro—to and fro, seeming to have a fear of the result of his first throw. The crowd surged near, breathless with eager suspense. Rut tut-tut! The box came down upon the counter, and the dice rolled out.

Two aces and a pair of deuces, and a tray!

"Two pair to beat," Deadwood Dick said, cupping the dice, shaking them, and then spilling them out upon the counter.

Result—no two of a kind!

A murmur of surprise swept the crowd. Coolly the Road Rocket re-cupped the dice, shook, and threw them, no trace of fear upon his face.

Five fours, this time, lay upon the counter. A curse escaped Foster, as he received the cup, gathered up the dice, shook them and threw four deuces.

"A horse apiece. Now, it's mine, or yours," he hissed, shaking the dice again and throwing them. "Ah! Five fives. Beat it, curse you, if you can!"

"I have every faith that I can," Deadwood Dick replied, as he scooped the dice into the cup, and shook them.

Closer surged the crowd—miners and outlaws mingled together, all trembling with a consuming eagerness to know the result.

Deliberately Deadwood Dick spilled the ivories out upon the counter and there were Five aces! He had won!

CHAPTER II.

A TRAITOR'S FATE—DEADWOOD DICK IN DENVER.

It was a thrilling, excitable moment, and a murmur of surprise stirred the crowd as the result of the last throw was made known.

"Gentlemen, the traitor has lost the victory," Deadwood Dick announced, calmly. "Although he did some fair throwing, I was so fortunate as to be able to better it. By the terms of my proposal, Foster, you have yet one chance in ten for your life—in walking the cable across Bonanza Gulch. If you fail, so be it. If you succeed in reaching the further side, your liberty is your own, and your debt to the Rough-and-Readys is canceled. Come! let's test the matter at once. Boys, remove the deserter."

Foster was again taken in charge by several of the road-agents, and ushered from the building into the street, Deadwood Dick leading the way.

The town was built upon the eastern bank of a fruitful abyss, which split the mountains for many miles, and was a black, terrible-looking chasm in the face of nature, descending almost straight downward into the face of the earth, and of unknown depth.

From bank to bank it was about three hundred feet across, and this distance was spanned by a two-inch wire cable, drawn taut, and fastened to trees fifty feet inland from each bank. Over this cable a pulley was tracked, and to that a large iron bucket was fastened, with ropes attached to it, so that the bucket and pulley could be pulled from one side of the abyss to the other. It was used for conveying ore from the opposite hills, over to the Big Bonanza Crushing Mill.

With firm step Deadwood Dick led the way through the mining camp, to this wild spot, followed by his masked comrades, and the heft of Big Bonanza's population, who had cloaked any moral scruples they may have had, under a desire to witness the novelty of the death-walk. For it seemed a natural impossibility for a man to walk across the abyss on the cable, without any balancing power save the motion of his body.

Foster, although he had proven himself an arch traitor, was a man of great nerve and control over his emotions, and, except for an unnatural pallor upon his cheeks, he took things as calmly as a stoic, and measured the distance over the abyss with a keen eye. Did he have any hope of being able to reach the further side alive, he did not betray the fact.

"Bind his hands behind his back. Orderly, and remove his feet covering," Deadwood Dick commanded, when a halt was made, at the brink of the chasm. "I'll give the traitor what mercy I can."

The command was promptly executed, and the deserter was soon in readiness for the life-or-death task before him.

For life or death it was, certainly.

It was life and liberty to successfully cross the chasm upon the cable and reach the other side in safety, or it was a frightful death to fail, and go plunging down into the depths of the abyss.

"All is ready, now, Frank Foster, so take advantage of the means offered you to escape. Your life is now in your own hands, to win or

lose, and you may thank me that you escaped instant death, at the hands of your comrades, here. Go! now, and may the Almighty guide your footsteps into the trail of a better life," Deadwood Dick said, in stern, ringing tones.

"Yes, I will go," Foster replied, fierceness in his tone; "but you would be more merciful to shoot me where I stand. But, mind you, Deadwood Dick, if ever I do escape, look out for me! I shall not forget your kindness of to-day, except at the muzzle of the revolver. I go, now—probably to a grave in the bottom of the abyss, but, die though I may, the spirit of Frank Foster will haunt you and pursue you with the constancy of a resistless fiend."

"All right. I shall be pleased to wrestle with your ghost, as soon as it puts in an appearance," the Road King laughed.

Then there was a silence.

Every man stood with bated breath, and gazed riveted upon the traitor, awaiting the issue.

It was a moment of terrible suspense, in which a human life was held on the finest thread of tissue, as it were.

Without further parley, Foster stepped upon the rope, above the bank on which the multitude was assembled, and balanced himself.

Then he stood still, and measured the line over which he was to venture, with a calculating glance—the two-inch trail between time and eternity. Then, seeming to gather all his powers under control, he stepped forward over the cable—out over the yawning gulf, that seemed waiting with distended jaws, to swallow him up. Carefully, yet steadily and rapidly he moved forward, each footstep being planted with precision. Never an instant did he waver or falter until within a hundred feet of the opposite side, when he was seen suddenly to sway to and fro, and with a yell of horror went plunging madly down! down! down! into the depths of the yawning unfathomable abyss.

Denver, Colorado.

It was midnight, the bell in a neighboring steeple having but recently tolled the hour of twelve.

The streets of the State Capital were pretty well deserted, at this hour, only an occasional wayfarer being abroad.

Over all objects the mellow radiance of a soaring full moon shed the most spectrally beautiful effect, and the warm breeze that wafted up from the south seemed impregnated with the odor of a thousand different blossoming flowers.

A man left the portals of one of the principal hotels, and walked down the deserted street, through the moonlight, his head bowed slightly, as if he was wrapped in meditation, and his hands locked behind his back, out of habit, more than anything else, perhaps.

He was attired in the full-dress uniform of a captain of the U. S. Army, and being of good figure made a fine appearance. In face he was not unhandsome, with a firm expressive mouth, shaded by a dark mustache; eyes of the same hue, and true as steel in their glance; regular features, browned by exposure to the sun and wind, and hair well trimmed, and of a dusky brown color.

He wore no weapons exposed to view, except his sword, but that was a costly gold-trimmed affair, in itself.

Without appearing to pay any attention to where he was going the officer continued on, his gaze riveted upon the walk in front of him, and his head bowed slightly forward.

In this way, he finally reached the end of the street, and crossing retraced his steps on the opposite side.

Suddenly he paused, and picked up something that lay upon the walk, before him.

It was a scrap of paper—a half sheet of legal cap, neatly folded, just as it had probably slipped from somebody's pocket, and been lost.

Opening the paper, the finder glanced it over, and made it out to be a map of the Indian Territory, drawn with a pen, and accurately locating rivers, mountains, reservations and Indian villages. But that was all, except a star in red ink, near the center of the map, surrounded by numerous trails, only one of which touched the star.

There was no written explanation—nothing that indicated what the map was for, or what was located at the star.

"I wonder if this is of any value to any one—it certainly is not to me," the officer muttered, folding the paper. "I will keep it, however, and it may serve me a good turn, some time! Ah!"

Sudden was the latter exclamation—it was no more sudden than the whipping of his sword

from its scabbard, and turning to face two cloaked masked men who had stealthily approached in the rear. A keen sense of hearing had the officer, and the way he met the emergency, evidenced the fact, that, always on his guard, he had been expecting the night-hawks.

"Back! you devils!" he cried, sternly, holding his gleaming blade ready for use. "You reckoned without your host, in thinking to take me at a disadvantage. I have been aware that I have been followed, secretly, all the way from Omaha—and, now, perhaps you will tell me what you are up to?"

The masked men stepped back out of reach of the sword, each with an oath on his lips. They were both enveloped in oil-cloth coats, belted at the waist, that reached to their top-boots, and wore hats and three-quarter masks of the same material. Both were men of ordinary stature, one being the taller by only two or three inches.

He carried a dangerous looking dirk knife in the grasp of his right hand, which seemed to indicate that his intention was to stab the officer in the back. But in this design he had, most luckily for the officer, been thwarted.

"Curses on you," the foremost ruffian hissed. "It is your salvation—our defeat. But wait! You have not seen the last of us. We are after your life, and we'll dog you to the ends of the earth but what we'll have it. D'ye know us? Ha! ha! probably not. But I will enlighten you. I am Frank Foster!"

"Indeed! Then, Mr. Foster, if you have any reason for wishing to take my life, perhaps you can borrow a sword, somewhere, and settle the matter at once," the officer said. "My handle is Captain Rip Percival, at your service, and if any person has a grudge against me, I always make it a point to hold myself in readiness to offer them satisfaction."

"I guess not!" the man with the dirk growled. "We ain't takin' no risks, ef we know ourselves. We prefer to play our hand quietly—that is to say, respectfully declining your liberal offer, we shall wait with all patience until we get a chance to slip a knife between your ribs, when you are not on your guard. Discretion is the better part of valor, you know. Ha! ha!"

"But delays are dangerous, you know," Percival warned. "No time like the present to settle, if you are willing."

"Which we are not," Foster returned, fiercely. "Don't think we do not know you, or that we shall leave off trailing you till death."

Then turning, they hurried back down the street, as rapidly as they could walk, finally vanishing around a corner.

Captain Percival gazed after them, until they had disappeared, a stern, half-puzzled expression upon his face.

"Can it be true that they have really penetrated my disguise, and that it was really Frank Foster, in under that mask and cloak?" he muttered, as he resheathed his sword, and continued on his way. "Can it be possible that he escaped after that frightful fall into the abyss at Big Bonanza? It seems incredible—yet it was his voice that spoke—his form, and must have been he in flesh and blood. How he could have escaped certain death is a mystery that surpasses my understanding. And if it is he, and he has penetrated this disguise, it's not a safe place for you in Denver, Deadwood Dick, old boy. But, why need I be surprised, or fear? Tracked! discovered! hounded from place to place, I always manage to keep on deck. Ha! ha! it's wearin' on me, though, and I am heartily sick of it. What tempted me down here to Denver, away from Calamity and the boys, I scarcely know—yet, here I am, and in jeopardy, too, if the meeting just now has any significance. But I will not retreat. I'll face the music, yet, and see what turns up."

Threading several of the prominent streets of Denver, disguised Deadwood Dick at last came to a saloon that was still lit up, despite the lateness of the hour, and sounds of voices came from the inside.

Over the entrance a creaking sign bore the inscription:

"STOCK EXCHANGE—M. MOSHER."

Impelled by a curiosity to know what was going on within, Percival, as we shall still continue to call him, opened the door and entered.

The interior was dingy and dirty, and far from prepossessing, with a thick fog of foul-smelling tobacco-smoke nearly obscuring all objects. An ill-stocked bar occupied one part of the room; a stove stood near the center, and around this a half-dozen men were seated, albeit there was no fire in the stove.

A Game of Gold.

A door near one end of the bar opened into an inner apartment, which was larger, better lighted and furnished with card tables, around which a number of men were collected.

Without pausing in the bar-room, Deadwood Dick entered the inner apartment, and seated himself.

The men around the tables were mostly prominent men of Denver, who had sought this retreat to smoke, talk and drink.

A few were engaged in some game, but not all.

Lighting a cigar, the pseudo-Percival comfortably positioned himself, and made pretensions of going off into a sound snooze.

He had not been long seated thus, when two other men entered, and took seats by a table near him; and some instinct told him that they were Foster and his companion. He had only to open and shut his eyes, slyly, to confirm this suspicion; but they were seated on the further side of a stove, and had evidently not seen him.

Foster's companion was a Missourian, with a hook-nose, small, bead-like eyes, and a greedy, avaricious expression of countenance. He was tall, lank, and roughly dressed, and as Foster addressed him as Mosher, Percival set him down as the proprietor of the saloon.

"Yes, there's a deep secret connected with the man," Mosher was saying, "which means millions of money, and we must find it out. One thing is plain: he is an inveterate gambler, and one of those men who, once they get the taste of whisky on top of a loss, never know when to put on the brakes, till they're whipped of every ducat they possess. That's the correct analysis of the man who calls himself Jackson Bird!"

"I am anxious to see him," Foster said. "Did you say he has been losing heavy?"

"Yes. He has left some fifty or sixty thousand dollars in Denver, to day, just through cards, and brags that he has more to win it back. He has drank like a fish, and an expert can easily win from him. He'll soon be in again. Ah! I told you. There he comes, now!"

Percival peeped through his half-closed eyelashes, and saw a man with unsteady gait enter the room. He was of commanding figure and richly attired, with a bearded face, dark eyes, and sweeping hair that fell over his shoulders.

The luster of the end of his nose and the wild blood-shot appearance of his eyes, however, seemed to point to the fact that he was a hard drinker, a fact that was betrayed in his walk.

As soon as he entered the room, Mosher led Frank Foster forward, saying:

"Mr. Bird, I have the honor of introducing to you Sir Roger Stanwix, an old English friend of mine, who is passionately fond of a social game."

"Social (hic) game, d'ye say?" the gambler hiccupped, with a stare. "(Hic). I never play (hic) 'cept it's for money."

"Ah! that would suit me still better," Foster said, rubbing his hands together delightedly. "It gives interest to the game, you know!"

CHAPTER III.

DICK TO THE RESCUE.

PERCIVAL closed his eyes again, and feigned slumber, as he saw the trio take seats at a table, but a few feet from him.

Foster had not yet discovered him, and as soon as they were once engrossed in the game the disguised ex-road-agent formed one of the group that gathered near to watch Jack Bird part with his gold.

Directly in the rear of the traitor, did Captain Percival stand, so that Foster could not notice him, without looking square around.

"B-boys! I am Jackson Bird, if you don't know me, an' I've bucked the tiger, an' the tiger's bucked me, for nigh twenty (hic) years, an' it's hard to tell which has come (hic) out ahead. Guess'er (hic) I'm a leetle the most bucked, jest now. Lost fifty thousan', since sunrise. 'Tain't nothing, tho', gents — 'taint nothin'. There's plenty of more gold up at Secret City, an' it's all mine. So ya want to play wi' me, do you, John Bull?"

"I'll take a hand, yes," Foster replied, with a crafty glitter in his eyes, "providing the stakes are not too high."

"Ten thousan' is my pile—the last I have to my name," the gambler replied. "See me ten if you dare. Ten I have—ten to bet on a simple game of the pastebords. Where's the man who wants to see me?"

"I," Foster replied, and from his pocket he drew a purse of plentious size and layed it upon

the table. "There is just that amount in the purse."

"Oho! you have money, then, if not wisdom," the gambler chuckled. "Well! well! I care not, so long as I retrieve my losses."

He took a check-book from his pocket, and wrote out a check on a prominent Denver bank for the amount of the wager, and then tore it from the book, and placed it with Foster's pile.

"There! that is the last of a fortune," he said, hoarsely. "If I lose that, I shudder for the consequences. Shuffle the cards, man, and see that you make no mismoves, or you'll find that I can look out for No. 1, even with a headache caused by Denver whisky. Go on, I say."

Foster accordingly shuffled the cards—then they were dealt, and the game began. The crowd gathered near, and watched with feverish interest.

Both players were excited to a high pitch, but neither spoke, until Frank Foster threw down the card which declared him to be the winner, and raked in the stakes with a triumphant laugh.

"Lost, by heaven!" Bird gasped, sinking back, a terrible glare in his eyes. "Gentlemen, after years of life at the table, I am obliged to come down to the acknowledgment that I am broke. It is something I have never experienced before, or I should not mention it. Every dollar I have in the wide world is gone—to the devil. Ha! ha! yes, to the devil. But hark ye—not the means of getting more—oh! no! Down in a certain mining district I yet own an entire city of gold—Secret City, 'tis called, and only a limited few, who are my friends, knows where to find it. Centuries might it lay undiscovered, a mining claim valued at millions, did I refuse to betray its location. Ha! ha! what would not you avaricious sharks give to know where to swoop down and find this bonanza of mine, with its invaluable quartz and placer mines, its trained and faithful regiment of Chinese miners—and above all its beauteous mistress, my queenly daughter Lola! Ah! could you but see her, you'd believe me that all other women are but untamed squaws, in comparison. Fair as a lily is my queen Lola, but none of you shall have her, even though I tempt you with a chance!"

"What yarn is this you are spinning us, now, Bird?" Mosher demanded. "You surely have no such a secret bonanza as you boast of."

"But I have, though!" the gambler cried, hoarsely, "and by it, I am going to win back what I have lost. In the inner pocket of my coat, there is a small map, pointing the trail that leads to my secret city of gold. Without it, no human being can ever hope to find it—with it, the road is as plain as the face of nature will allow. I am desperate. Either I must win back the fortune I have lost among you Denver sharks, or I will lose all—everything, even to that pure flower that blooms in its youthful budding, down in Secret City. Ah! yes, I promised Lola, when I came hence, that I would hold my passion for gambling with a conquering hand, and cast the cards from my way. But the temptation was too great, and I turned my last promise to her into a lie. Do you think then, that I would return to her, penniless and let her know my unmanly faithlessness? No! never! Either I will win back all, or I will lose all, and blow my brains out in this room. Do you hear me? I mean business—I, Jackson Bird, who have bucked the tiger since I was of age. I mean business! I'll bet the paper in my pocket, which is the map that locates the secret golden city I have told you of, against fifty thousand dollars, that I honestly win the next game. If I win, the cash is mine; if my opponent wins, I will surrender to him the paper, which not only tells how to reach Secret City, with its golden wealth, but makes the holder of the paper the sole and only owner and manager of the mines, the town, and all in it, be it human or inanimate. There! now—who's my man?"

"But what right have we to believe you are not romancing?" Foster demanded. "I know of no such Secret City as you speak of—or nor that its value is a cent's worth. Prove to us first, that which you would have us gamble for, and we shall be more ready for the snare."

"Bah! you are a fool," Bird retorted, sneeringly. "Wouldn't you like me to expose my precious paper to view, so some of you devils—sharks could grab it and run away? No! no!—when you get the best of old Jack Bird of Secret City, let me know. I have the paper in my pocket, however, and I'll give it over to the man who wins it. Now who speaks first?"

There was no reply. Every one seemed to hesitate.

Men were there present, who represented large shares in Denver's financial enterprises, but they were chary about venturing so large a sum as fifty thousand dollars. Bird's luck, to be sure, had been badly against him, but there was no telling when it might change.

Mosher, the proprietor of the place, motioned to Foster, and the two went aside.

"Take him up on that," the saloon-keeper said, eagerly, "and beat him. This Secret City is no myth. I have heard of it before, and, they who claim to know, hint that there are mines there worth more than enough money to pay the national debt."

"Ah! but I have but the twenty thousand, ten of which I have just won," Foster growled. "He asks fifty, and that knocks me all out of time."

"But I have thirty to add to it, providing you recognize me as a partner, if you win, and give me half of everything."

"Agreed. We have been chums for years, and may as well continue the same way. Give me the swag, an' I'll tackle the old cuss."

"But hold!" Mosher said, in a low tone. "Mind that you win, or we are both beggars. Once you get the paper in your hand, and the secret of the whereabouts of Secret City, and we're made."

"Perhaps the devil is fooling us, and has no such paper?"

"Then we'll knife him," the saloon proprietor growled, savagely. "But, I reckon Jack Bird knows better 'n to fool that way with Max Mosher. Go head. The money's in this package."

And as he finished speaking, the saloon-keeper placed a large sealed envelope in the ex-road-agent's hands, and the two men returned to the table.

Bird was watching them, impatiently, through his shaggy lashes.

"Well, are ye goin' ter play?" he demanded, as Foster seated himself.

"I am," was the reply, "and I'm going to win, old man, fairly."

"We shall see about that," Bird retorted.

"Mosher, you man, fetch a fresh deck of cards."

The cards were produced, and Bird went carefully over them in order to ascertain that they were all there, and new and unmarked.

The crowd in the gambling saloon had by this time increased to nearly one hundred people, among which were a mass of the rougher element, as well as the more refined.

All crowded as near the table as possible, to watch the game of such unusual risk. It was no common occurrence in Denver for men to risk fifty thousand dollars on the chances contained in a pack of cards. Therefore the interest the contest excited, was great.

Bird allowed Foster to cut the cards; then shuffled and dealt them himself, in a manner that betrayed experience.

Then, the game began, neither of the gamesters speaking, but their faces delineating their eager expectation.

In breathless suspense those of the crowd who could not see the table, waited, and waited impatiently, for the result; not that, as a crowd, they had any particular choice as to who should win, but because of a natural desire to have one party win, and then watch the discomfiture of the other.

At last, there was a cry of desperation, and a hand struck the table heavily. It was Jackson Bird who uttered the cry—it was the hand of Frank Foster that struck the table, even as he gave vent to a laugh wherein was expressed the most malicious triumph—for he, Foster, had won!

"Ha! ha! and so it comes to pass that even youth and beauty of the land shall conquer old age," he cried, rising from the table, with an affected yawn. "Come, pardner, dish over your stake, and I'll retire to my hotel. I'm most devilish sleepy."

"Yes, you have won," Bird muttered, hoarsely, his eyes riveted upon the floor—"won, and I am a beggar—an accursed worthless wretch! But, what matters it? Gold has ever been the curse of my life, and when I've put an end to that life, gold and the gaming-table will have lost a point. Ah!" with a glaring glance at Foster; "you're waiting for the map are you? Curse you—shall I be fool enough to yield it to you, and thus place you in possession of all I hold dear upon this earth? Tell me, man—have you the heart to demand that paper, knowing that it not only makes me a beggar and more of a wretch than I am, but tears from me my own daughter, Queen Lola—the only redeeming hope of my wild and reckless existence? Speak—tell me, man!"

The gambler had risen to his feet, terribly excited, his voice trembling, and a strange, wild glitter to his fiery eyes.

Foster, Mosher and several kindred spirits had involuntarily rested a hand upon a weapon in their respective belts, and this fact seemed to evidence that the tide of human sympathy was against the unlucky gambler.

"Heart is something out of my line, pard," Foster responded, with a grin. "Fifty thousand dollars worth of heart is a surfeit, and I don't take any stock in it. The game was fairly won by me, and I'll now accept of the paper, if you please!"

"And if I don't please—?" Bird queried.

"Then, I shall take the liberty of making you please, or shall make you ready for the first hearse that comes along. In other and shorter words, you'll have to fork over the paper or relinquish your life grip of this earthly atmosphere!"

"On course. It's no time ter play shenanigan, now," Mosher put in. "You'd better pony up the paper, Bird, and save unpleasant trouble. To be sure we are in the States, here in Denver, but we don't stand long on legal ceremonies when a feller shows the black flag."

And the crowd nodded their approval of this bit of logic—among them men who to the outside daily world graced the toned business circles of the town.

"Yes! yes! I suppose it is my duty in honor to give up the paper," Bird murmured, his gaze again reverting to the floor—"but, God in Heaven guard and watch over my poor child! Here, man," and his right hand sought an inner pocket, "is the—Ah! Heaven! what is this? Gone!—the paper lost? Then I, too, am lost!"

"What! what is this you say?" Foster hissed, advancing with a furious oath. "Do you mean to tell me that you have been fooling me after all—that you have not the paper you claimed to have?"

"No! I have not been fooling—I had the paper, not three hours ago, in my inner pocket, and supposed I still had it there, to this minute. But it is gone! Either I have been robbed, or have lost it, while on the street."

"Liar!" Foster fairly yelled, his face dark with aroused passion; "your excuses will avail you not. You have cheated me, and the consequences are on your own head!"

The next instant there was a sharp flash and a report, and Jackson Bird threw up his hand and staggered back—to be caught in the arms of Captain Percival, who had all the time stood in his rear. And with one strong arm supporting the gamboier, Percival drew a revolver with his other hand.

"Back, there!" he ordered, his eyes flashing fire, and his weapon on a level with Foster's breast, as the villain would have sprung upon his victim to finish the deadly job he had inaugurated—"back, Frank Foster, or I'll finish the job Deadwood Dick left unfinished, up in the mines. You know what I mean—so git out of my sight, or you're a dead man!"

"Ha! you here?" the traitor gasped, leaping back, as he for the first time noticed his former captain. "Curse you! curse you! this is a pleasant surprise, for I now can kill two birds with one stone, and obtain my promised vengeance. Ha! ha! you are mine, now, even as I was yours, in that little rope-walking scrape up at Big Bonanza. Boys, look at the precious pilgrim—does he not look like a thoroughbred—a regular orang-outang? That's a road-agent, boys, and none other than the notorious individual called Deadwood Dick!"

"Ay! I am Deadwood Dick, and they have all heard from me, now, if never before!" the young man cried, in a stern ringing tone, while his eyes flashed a glance of defiance. "You need not draw your weapons, gents, for I am no meat of yours. I am going to assist this gambler here to a place where he can die in peace, as I see he is mortally wounded."

"If you mind your own affairs, and let me take my departure without interruption, all will be well. But if you attempt to prevent me from carrying out my intention, the past record of Deadwood Dick shall be a guarantee of what will follow. Remember! I am but one man, and alone, but when forced to it, I can do the deadly work of a half a score!"

And, half carrying, half-dragging the wounded gambler upon his left arm, and keeping the revolver in his right hand leveled at the crowd, the brave ex-outlaw retreated, step by step toward the door. Involuntarily the crowd moved in front of them, and cried:

"Back, boys! It's certain death to some of you to follow that man, who's filled more grave-

yards than the devil himself. Foster, come back!"

"When I do, it will be with the heart of Deadwood Dick in my hand!" the traitor returned, ferociously. "Stand there like a pack of cowardly coyotes, if you choose. I am not afraid to face the tiger. Ah!"

He had no tiger to face, for, with an unexpected suddenness, Deadwood Dick had leaped through a window, with his charge, and was lost to view—an action so quickly executed that it had freed him from the crowd!

CHAPTER IV.

EXIT BIRD—ROBBED.

ONCE in the street, Deadwood Dick lifted the wounded man more upon his shoulder, and sped along into the night, beneath its great soaring moon and starry dome.

Not far had he gone, when he heard a shout, and turning and looking back he saw the crowd pouring from Mosher's saloon.

Quickly, then, he dodged into an alley, or by-street, at his right, in time to escape discovery, and hurried up its course between rows of high but dingy habitations, for the most part inhabited by Chinese.

He finally came to a building, however, on the door of which was posted a "To Rent" placard, and mounting the steps and trying the door, he found it unlocked.

The next instant he bore Bird into the dwelling, which proved to be tenantless, and barred the door behind him.

A heap of refuse and old worn-out carpets were the only things that told that the place had ever been inhabited before, except for the dust and cobwebs strewn around.

Quickly arranging the carpets and rags about into the shape of a bed, Deadwood Dick deposited the gambler upon them, as tenderly as possible, and propped up his head.

He was very white, and also weak from a copious loss of blood, some of which had stained the garments of the ex-Prince of the Road.

"Who are you?" Bird asked, as Dick knelt by his side, and endeavored to stanch the flow of blood. "Whoever you are, I thank you and my Lord that I have yet life in my worthless carcass, for there is yet something I would say."

"Then confide whatever secrets you may deem best, to my care, and I'll not betray your confidence. My name is Edward Harris—or at least that has always been the name I claimed allegiance to—*my nom de plume*, however, is Deadwood Dick!"

"Ah! yes—Foster called you that, and I have heard of it before. You have been a road-agent?"

"Yes—so-called. Be it said to my credit, however, I have never been guilty of one-half of the misdeeds shouldered upon me. But, your wound—that is of the most importance now. Can you remain alone, while I seek a physician?"

"No! no! It is no use to seek medical aid, for I am past all help. I feel the grip of death already fastened upon me, and I've but a few minutes yet on earth. Still, I am not afraid to make my last journey to my Maker's home, for, gambler and reckless man though I have been, I have ever been honest in my dealings, and have been guilty of no heinous crime. Hark! are they not coming?"

"No; I hear nothing," Dick replied, after listening. "Your fancy is leading you off track. Go on, and fear nothing, for I flatter myself I cleverly eluded them."

The light of the soaring moon shone through a window, upon the face of the dying gambler, whose gaze rested steadfastly upon the great luminary.

"It is of the map I would speak," he said, slowly. "It was not my design to cheat my opponent, and I supposed the paper was in my pocket until I sought for it, there, and found it gone. What became of it I have not the slightest idea, but I am glad that it is lost, in hope that if it ever is found, it will fall into the hands of some better party than Frank Foster!"

"Rest at ease, then, for I undoubtedly have the very document," Deadwood Dick said, producing the paper he had found upon the street, earlier the same evening.

Bird gave vent to an utterance of joy as he saw it.

"Yes, yes! That is the paper. God be praised that it is found. Where did you get it, sir?"

Deadwood Dick explained in a few words; then added, as he listened intently:

"You had best intrust it to my care again, for I think I heard footsteps outside, and Foster or some of his men may be spying about."

"Yes! take it, young man, and keep it. I know you will be as good a fellow as I can intrust it to, for I have heard that, though an outlaw, you are a man of honor. Surely you would take no mean advantage over the fatherless, motherless girl, whom that paper consigns to your power."

"No!" Deadwood Dick said, proudly. "I will hunt up this girl, and give her her liberty and this paper. I am no villain, to take advantage of power over the weaker sex, nor even over my own sex, unless they drive me to it."

"Good! Your words cause me to feel easier. Another thing—these two blood-hounds, Foster and Mosher, may attempt to ferret out my Secret City, and succeed. Should they do so, my daughter will be at their mercy. Can I hope that you will strike a blow in her defense?"

"Ay—you can rely upon it. I will guard her and her interests."

Then, all became silence in the room.

Jackson Bird lay peacefully upon his rude but easy bed.

His gaze continued fixed upon the moon, which gleamed through the window, and his lips were parted, as though he were in silent prayer.

And thus he continued, until his eyes slowly closed, a peculiar deathly pallor stole over his countenance, his bosom ceased to heave—and he was dead.

It did not seem that he had more than fallen asleep, yet Deadwood Dick was aware, without investigation, that his spirit had passed into the realms which no earthly being can penetrate until summoned by the hand of the Almighty.

To make sure, he placed his ear over the gambler's heart, but his first conclusion was only verified, for the heart had ceased to beat.

Carefully covering the body with some of the old carpet, Dick once more rose to his feet, and stepped toward the door, bent on leaving the place, and sending an undertaker to care for the remains.

As he did so a hand was laid upon his arm, and a voice said, in a low, warning tone:

"Sh! don't venture out that way, or you are lost. Foster and Mosher are waiting for you, backed by some of the latter's pals, and the deputy sheriff."

In surprise Dick turned to discover that his accoster was a fair-skinned, beardless youth, and of fine form, while his attire consisted of top-boots, buck-skin breeches and hunting-shirt, with a slouch hat upon his head.

A mask was worn over the upper portion of his face, including the eyes, which gleamed sharply through holes made for their accommodation.

"Who are you?" the ex-outlaw demanded, stepping back, and surveying the new-comer sharply.

"I am Toothpick—Little Toothpick they call me. I came to warn you of danger, and assist you out of it," was the reply.

"And why? What good turn have I ever done you, that you should wish to favor me?" was the query; for seldom, in his life experience, thus far, had Deadwood Dick met with favors that had not in some way been bestowed.

"No turn at all, sir stranger, but I was in the saloon a bit ago, and saw how matters went, and so took sides with you. Besides, I have often heard of you as a man whose cause it would be an honor to espouse—a brave, fearless, faithful man, who was ever a friend to friends, and foe to foes, without exception."

"Well, then, I am glad to meet you," Deadwood Dick said, extending his hand to shake with the stranger. "Toothpick, you said your name is?"

"Yes—Little Toothpick, you may call me. Another name once belonged to me, but a bank defalcation occurred, and the crime was pointed to me, although God knows I was innocent. But, in order to escape ten years behind prison bars, I was forced to skin out, and hide my identity in a disguise. You see me now. I am an outlaw and an outcast. I have to skulk about at night, and lie low, in day. I heard of you and saw you. I watched and waited, and saw an opportunity to assist you. Here I am, ready to do it."

"Ah! exactly. And after you release me from a tight place, I suppose it will be in order for you to want a compensation for your trouble," Dick said, endeavoring to study the fellow, in a thorough way.

"No, pard, you mistake me. That is not my layout at all. If we succeed in escaping from this nest, my only hope shall be that you may see fit to let me remain with you as a valet, or servant."

"And why thus?"

"Because, there is power in union, and I would be among those who could fight for me, if needed, and whom I could fight for, in return."

"Then you may accompany me, until I find you untrusty," the young chief said. "Treachery is punishable with death—so beware. You say the front is guarded?"

"Yes, doubly guarded. Your only hope of escape lies in following me. Come!"

Motioning for Dick to follow, Little Toothpick led the way back through a rear hall that finally opened into a sort of walled yard or court, from whence led a narrow alley, in a northerly course.

Following this route, they entered one of the principal streets of Denver, and soon after came to the hotel where the ex-Prince of the Road was registered.

"We won't stop here," he said, "but will seek another place, in order to avoid discovery. I fortunately have several disguises about my clothes, and can baffle the best of them."

Another large hotel soon loomed up, and, as it was open, Dick announced his intention of turning in for the remainder of the night.

well enough to make a copy, in case I should lose this, or it should be stolen. If I mistake not, Foster will not give up the hope of getting on track of what so neatly slipped from his grasp, and in that case, it will be advisable to be prepared for him."

It did not take many minutes for him to pen an exact copy of the map, as cleverly as though he were used to such work. Folding the original document, neatly, he placed it inside the lining of his hat, and threw the latter carelessly on the floor. The other paper he thrust into a vest pocket, carelessly.

"There. If I lose one I have a duplicate. In case an attempt is made to rob me, they may find the copy, but not the original. Now, then, for a snooze—something I have not had for the last forty-eight hours."

He threw himself upon the bed, and was soon off in a heavy sleep—the first, as he had said, that had visited him for over two days and nights.

It was broad daylight, when he awoke, and the sun was shining in through a window, upon his face.

"Ah! I have overslept myself," he said, rising, and preparing to make his toilet. "Ah! I wonder if the papers are all right?"

Slipping his finger into his vest pocket, he felt the paper still there, and as his hat still lay where he had thrown it upon the floor, he thought no more of the matter, at the time.

wild, bowlderous valley, silvered by a rushing mountain streamlet, the first shadowy harbingers of night were creeping.

It was a rugged, wild scene, this valley, running northward and southward, as the crow flies, and its width of two miles one vast broken tract of rocks and bowlders, with a few trees scattered here and there.

Along down the bank of the stream a wagon-track ran, but it was not used much, evidently, judging by the fact that grass grew in the track as if there was no track at all.

Hist! a voice!

A sweet, melodious voice, too, breaking out in a snatch of weird song, the words of which cease, as the singer strides into view, and the echo goes detonating on down the valley.

Is it a girl—or is it a man?

Thus wonders a man, at least, who, half-reclining upon the grass, beside the stream, gazes at the approaching person in surprise and admiration.

A medium-sized fellow, this stranger, with a browned yet handsome face, and a figure which, as it stretched out, denoted strength, endurance and activity. A dark mustache, with broad, wavy ends graced his lip, and partly shaded a resolute but pleasant mouth, and hair of the same hue waved back from his forehead and fell upon his shoulders.

His feet were incased in knee-boots, which were in turn met by buckskin breeches and hunting-shirt, both nicely fringed and embroidered, and a dark cape about his shoulders. His hat lay upon the grass by his side, and the cool evening breeze fanned his brow.

A rifle also lay upon the ground near his hat, and a pair of silver-plated revolvers in his belt spoke of the fact that he was not unarmed.

And the girl—this creature coming down the disused wagon-trail!

If beauty ever graced the face and form of woman, she certainly had a goodly share of both.

Of medium height of women, she possessed a rarely curved and symmetrically proportioned form that appeared to advantage in the neatly-fitting garb she wore—a costume of Indian tanned buckskin, consisting of breeches and hunting-shirt, the latter belted at the waist, and touching nearly to the patent-leather knee-boots she wore. A hat upon the jauntily-poised head and a single revolver in her belt, completed her costume.

As for the face of this sylph, it was in one defined word "handsome."

Every feature was perfectly chiseled and prettily outlined; the mouth wore a habitual winning expression, with lips tempting enough to kiss; the cheeks were suffused with a healthful tint; the eyes spoke forth a glance just bold enough to suggest courage and will, even while they shone with the same fascinating expression of winsomeness that characterized the mouth.

An abundance of golden hair was tossed about her shoulders, from beneath her jaunty hat, its color corresponding harmoniously with some of the reflections of the hazy sunset horizon.

As he gazed at her, there came a strange expression over the face of the man lounging by the stream.

"Like Calamity Jane, and yet not like her," he muttered, thoughtfully. "Who in blazes can it be, I wonder, roaming in this wild spot? Not Jackson Bird's daughter, I fancy, even though she lacks not beauty. Guess she does not see me, yet. Perhaps I may learn from her whether or not I am anywhere near the goal of my ambition—Secret City."

The man, as the reader has probably surmised, was none other than Deadwood Dick, the ex-road-agent.

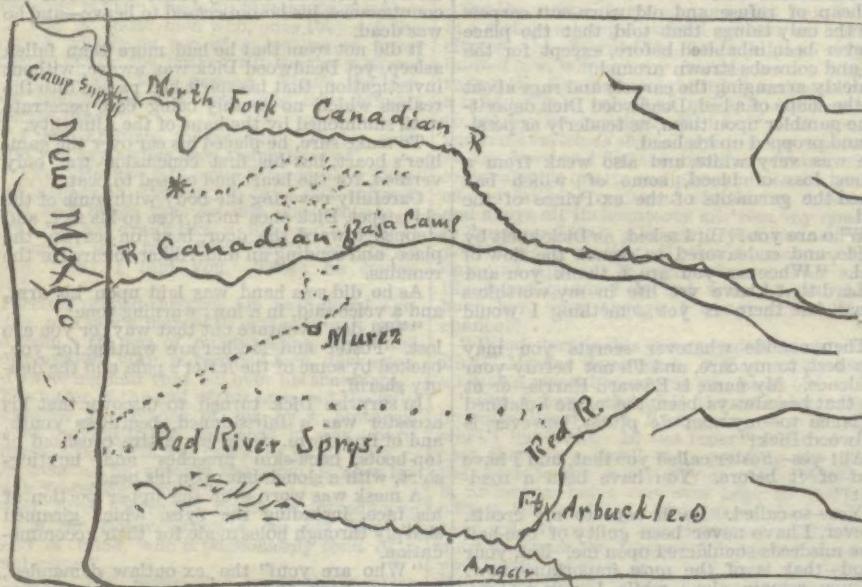
Nearly three weeks before, he had set out from Denver, in search of the golden camp that had once belonged to Jackson Bird, but until now he had journeyed through the Indian Territory, unsuccessful in his mission, and meeting with adventures, that would have appalled many a man less brave than the ex-chief.

Without the maps, he had found that he could only depend upon guesswork, and patient search; and it was some bad guessing he had made.

The young woman came nearer and nearer, and was almost upon him before she discovered him. To lessen her alarm, he feigned to be dozing, until her sharp exclamation aroused him to such an extent that he glanced around.

She was standing but a few feet distant, and surveying him in a way that evidenced surprise but not alarm.

"Well," she said, with business-like precision, as Dick arose and bowed, "who are you?"



"Then I will bid you good-night, until I can go and remove my mask, and sufficiently disguise myself, so that I can join you," Little Toothpick said. "I may not be able to join you soon, and again I may; but do not be concerned if you do not see me again before you leave the city."

"Very well. I shall pull out of Denver, before another evening, probably."

He then entered the hotel, and secured an apartment, and was soon by himself.

His room contained a bed, center-table and chairs, of a pretty appearance, and every appointment was neat and cleanly, in the extreme.

Turning on the gas, and seating himself, Deadwood Dick took the map of Secret City from his pocket, and glanced it over, closely, marking with his sharp eye, every feature of it, as penciled out by its former owner.

"No Secret City is marked down here, that I can see," he muttered, at length, "unless the star is meant to indicate the location of the place. Ah! even so."

He had chanced to hold the paper between him and the light, and the secret was revealed.

Stamped in water color just across the star, were the words: "Secret City."

Above is a fac-simile of the map that Deadwood Dick had received from Jackson Bird:

"The golden camp lies somewhere between the two Canadians," Dick mused, "but it is hard to tell just where, without following the dotted line, which is probably meant to represent a wagon trail, or Indian route. But from Denver there must be a shorter way of reaching it than going down into New Mexico to hunt up the trail. This map is really of no actual value; yet it occurs to me that it will be

After washing and combing, he took a parcel from one of his pockets, and untied it.

It proved to be a jet-black wig and long false beard and mustache, and removing the mustache he wore, he donned the disguise in short order, the change being most strikingly artistic and complete.

"Ha! ha! I can pass friends or foes, now, without risking discovery," he muttered, as he surveyed himself in the glass. "I look like a veritable Black Donald of modern days."

He next stripped off his soldier's garb, and underneath was revealed a tasty suit of black. Removing the military trimmings from his hat, he stood transformed from Captain Percival, U. S. A., to Deadwood Dick, of Deadwood. It was while removing the trimmings from his hat, that he made the startling discovery that the lining was gone from his hat, and the map also!

Hastily thrusting his hand into his vest pocket, he drew forth the other paper, which was simply a blank piece!

He had been robbed while sleeping!

There was no two ways about this, and he gave vent to a cry of vexation.

"Euchered, as I'm a man!" he gasped—"and by whom? Some one smarter than I credited, anyhow. But, never mind. If Frank Foster has got the papers, it does not signify who will win this little game. I have a faint idea that I'll be the man!"

CHAPTER V. ANGEL

SUNSET.

Soft blue skies, with a hazy horizon of eastward mountains, into which the red luminary of day was dipping its lower crest, while into a

"At your service, Edward Harris, miss—more commonly called Deadwood Dick," was the courteous reply. "And may I be so bold as to reverse the interrogation, and ask you who you are, miss?"

"Well, I reckon what's fair for the hoss is fair for the wagon, as they say over on the Las Vegas route; and as for my name, it's Arnot—Angel Arnot. What fetches you down into this locality, stranger?"

"I might pertinently reverse that interrogative, and inquire what you, a young and pretty woman, are doing in this wild place, but I refrain, as it is none of my business," Deadwood Dick returned, with a faint smile.

Angel Arnot eyed him, inquisitively.

"Then that's as much as to say that it's none of my business what brings you here?"

"Oh! certainly not. I have no objection to stating my errand, as it is no secret. I am in search of a place called Secret City, and a young woman by name Lola Bird."

"Humph!" And Miss Angel Arnot gave vent to a prolonged whistle of surprise. "Everybody seems to be on that same track, jest about now. Twasn't only about a week ago that a feller, who calls himself Foster, came down here on my stage, along with another chap he calls Mosher, an' they both were after finding Secret City and Lola Bird."

Deadwood Dick gave vent to an exclamation of disappointment.

"Then I am too late, probably, to be of any use," he said, sadly. "What has been the result of these men's coming to Secret City, miss?"

"Dunno, 'cept that Foster steps into old Jack Bird's boots, and bosses things about pretty much as he takes a notion. Can't boss this chicken, though. He come up and give me a dose of his chin-music, last night, on the street, an' I give him a slap across the mouth that made it look like a collapsed balloon."

Deadwood Dick laughed.

Some of the girls mannerisms reminded him of Calamity Jane, in her "tearing" moods.

"What is your business, or profession?" he inquired, growing interested in her, without knowing it. "I suppose you have some calling to keep you in this uncivilized region."

"Reckon I have. Mebbe some liar will insinuate that I ain't jest as much of a saint as I ought to be, but, don't you believe it. I hang around, and drive the stage down inter New Mexico, once a week, fer supplies, on a contract wi' Bird. That's my biz. Then, I'm what they call a 'moonlighter'—that is, after all the folks is to bed, I do a little private mining on my own hook, and accumulate a couple o' dollars every night, or so. Guess I'll get snuffed out, one of these times, but it won't make much difference. They won't spill any brine over my grave."

And there appeared to be a tinge of sorrowful loneliness in her tone, as if she had no friends—nothing to draw her back to earthly associations.

"But, mind you," she continued, after a moment, "there ain't the pilgrim that can douse my glim, if they give me equal chances. Going to Secret City?"

"I hardly know whether I shall or not. This announcement that Foster and Mosher are ahead of me, causes me to hesitate—not because I fear them, but because my visit to Miss Bird would probably now be useless."

"Well, I dunno. There has a change come over Queen Birdie, as we call her—and that change has all appeared since Foster came. She is no longer the blithe merry lass she used to be, but keeps herself indoors, and closely reclusive. 'Speck something has happened to old gambler Jack, the miserable old sot and card-sharp."

"Ay. Something has happened to him," Deadwood Dick replied, "something irreparable, for he is dead!"

"Dead!" The girl staggered back at the words, as though she had been dealt a blow. "Jackson Bird dead?"

"Yes, miss. I was with him to the last. He got into a row over a wager he could not pay, and Foster shot him in the breast. He lived scarcely an hour afterward."

"Ah! I see then what brings you to Secret City. He sent you."

"Yes. You've heard, probably, of the map he possessed, and how, at his death, the mines and the daughter all reverted to the party who was so fortunate as to inherit the map."

"Yes. Only the day before the man Foster came, Lola was telling me about it, and trembling with fear lest the map should fall into the hands of some unscrupulous villain, who would use the power he held over her. So you have the map, have you?"

"No. I had it, but it was stolen from me, and I was left unarmed, without the least clew to guide me to the secret gold-mines, except my memory of what I had seen upon the map. Believing that either Foster or Mosher had obtained possession of the map, I resolved to work my way hither, in hopes of reaching Miss Bird first, telling my story, and thus baffling the precious pair of scoundrels. But I am too late."

"Yes, I reckon you are. They must have had the dockymen, or the Queen wouldn't never have let 'em take charge of matters. Suppose they're not worry soft on you, eh?"

"I presume not," Dick replied, with a smile, "inasmuch as I made Foster meet the reward of treachery, a short time ago."

"Probably that was the reason of Foster's posting a placard at all the principal approaches to the camp, warning strangers to turn back and avoid unseen perils that lurked in the wilderness, which had encompassed a band of sturdy emigrants a week since."

"Ha! ha! a clever way of keeping back the tide of immigration, no doubt, but I'll vouch that it was not meant for me, for Foster knows me well enough to be positive nothing could scare me off, once I set out to reach a given point. Not even death has ever turned me back."

"Well, I admire your grit, anyhow, and if you want any assistance or advice, just call on me. I'm a particular friend to Queen Birdie, but not to the fellow Foster, or his villainous-looking colleague. Going to town?"

"Well, that is something I cannot answer just now, as I have yet to learn where this golden camp is located."

"Oh! that's it, eh? Well, I can enlighten you, though you're the first pilgrim as ever learned where Secret City was, through my instrumentality. Follow the trail up the stream, and just around that bend you'll find all there is of the camp."

Then turning, abruptly, the girl Jehu wandered on down the trail, without looking back, her pretty lips emitting a flow of wild peculiar melody, as weird and strange as the wilderness around her. Deadwood Dick watched her until mighty rocks had hidden her figure from view; then he sat down once more upon the bank of the little stream, and gazed thoughtfully into the rushing waters.

"A queer character, that girl—but, then, the whole world is made up of queer characters. I wonder if I had best venture into the town, and look into matters? Yes, that is my duty, for I promised Bird I would look after his child, and to back out, because two men have got ahead of me, would not be according to my principles. If I mistake not, there will be warm times hereabouts yet."

Angel Arnot, in the meantime, continued on down the trail which followed the serpentine curvings of the stream, her voice awaking the echoes from many a rocky fastness of the wild rugged valley.

That she was happy, and utterly fearless, appeared evident, for such was her appearance, even as the sun died entirely out of sight behind the western range, and dusky shadows crept phantom-like, over all objects in the valley—shadows piled upon shadows, behind which a countless horde of silent lurking foes might easily find concealment.

Still she kept bravely on without quailing or apparent hesitation until—

A man stepped from behind a huge black boulder, and stood in her path, just as the moon raised its upper crest above the eastern horizon—a man wrapped in a heavy oil-cloth coat that reached to his boot-tops, and wore a slouch black hat upon his head—a man whose beard of a jetty color nearly hid all the shape of his features and corresponded with the color of his long shaggy hair.

Angel Arnot had evidently been expecting him, for she stopped, without betraying either surprise or alarm, and put out her fair hand, which the dark man grasped and shook warmly.

"So you've come, eh?" he said, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Well, I'm glad of it. I thought you was lying to me when you said you'd come!"

"Bah! Jeb McKandlass, you did not think any thing of the kind, or you would not have come twenty miles. You know that Angel Arnot makes no practice of lying."

"Waal, that's so, gal. I guess you're purty straight, as fur as that is concerned. But the gold—did you fetch it?"

"I did," and she drew a small leathern bag from her pocket, as she spoke. "There it is—all I have got in the wide world."

"What! what is this, Angel—I don't understand—"

"Stop!" the girl said, imperatively—"stop, Jeb McKandlass. It is your gold, now—it was my gold before. Understand me, mine. You are Jeb McKandlass, a bold, bad, designing man—more, a trusted Indian agent of the U. S. Government, you claim. You discover a secret miner's camp here in Indian territory, which is forbidden ground to the pale-faces. You know I have some interest in the camp, and therefore, you come to me, and propose to silence your honest scruples with a hundred dollars, and let the Secret City exist as such. There is the hundred dollars—now, what more have you the face to demand?"

"Ha! ha! as for the face, Miss Angel, I reckon Jeb McKandlass has face enough for to demand a million. But, ye kno' there's some leetle sense o' honor in every dog, be he a cur or a mastiff, an' I'll allow I ain't any exception. The swag is satisfactory, an' ye can depend on it I'll keep mum, fer a while. But et's bound to leak out, gal—it's bound to leak out, an' don't ye fergit it."

"How do you mean?" the girl demanded, a startled expression flitting across her pretty face, betraying the anxiety she felt.

CHAPTER VI.

AT BAY.

MCKANDLASS paused a moment, as if weighing his words before answering.

"I mean," he said, finally, "that I am not the only outsider who knows of the existence of this mining camp hidden away here in the heart of this reserved Indian land. Old Scowler and his braves—or at least a trusted few of them—know of the camp and its location, and being as tough a gang o' red-skins as ever salted a scalp, and having no particular love for the white race, it looks altogether likely that there'll be a big jamboree, soon."

"But there must not!" Angel cried, anxiously. "You have the power, Jeb McKandlass, to hold these red furies in check, and you must do it."

"Humph! a fellow might as well try ter hold a double condensed tornado in check, mis, as ter stop a pack o' Indians, once they get their mind set on anything. I've learned that, long ago, an' fixed my mind on the fact that as long's a feller ain't got but one scalp, he'd better hang to it."

"Then you won't interfere for me in behalf of—the town yonder?" the girl demanded, her eyes wandering up the valley, toward Secret City.

"Reckon not, gal—twouldn't do no especial good, for Scowler ain't o' a coaxitive disposition," was the reply.

"But still I declare that you must not allow him to raise his hand against aught in Secret City. Listen, Jeb McKandlass! There is that in yonder camp, so dear to me, that I would sacrifice a hundred human lives, rather than harm should come to it. It matters not what it is, to you—but my reason for wishing the town to stand, is one of the strongest of my life. Say no more of that, then. You are, you claim, Jeb McKandlass, an Indian agent, appointed by the government. You have known me or of the existence of Secret City but three months—yet, in that time I have rescued you from death, at the hands of a grizzly. Can you stand there and face me then, sir, and tell me that you will allow Old Scowler the Sioux, to descend in his vengeance upon this town, without an intervention on your part?"

"Waal, I dunno. I ain't a werry hard cuss ter deal with, tho' thar's some dark streaks been wiped ag'in my character, Miss Angel. I've kinder tuk en notion to you, who ar' ther only woman 'cept the mother I had, years ago, wot ever thought me worth noticin'. I'm all alone in ther world, too, an' now, ef I was to slip a knife scientifically and systematically into Old Scowler's human pulsometer, would you—would you—blame it, would you marry me?"

"No!" the girl replied, with stern emphasis. "You are a fool to imagine I'd have such a man as you, Jeb. Nothing but a Lord or a Duke will ever get me! Why, I should dig your eyes out before we'd been married a week."

"Then you can marry your Duke—I'll pass," McKandlass said in his quick grim way. "I've hed one dose o' them same kind o' cattymount women, an' I ain't purticler about bein' wisted wi' another dose—no, I'll be cussed if I am."

"Ha! ha! I thought you wouldn't. You're a man of good sense," Angel laughed. "Old Kit Carson used to say a mad woman is more dangerous than a mad—mad musketeer, an' I believe it. But I must not be tarrying here. Night is setting in, and it is time I were in my

shanty. Promise at least one thing, Jeb McKandlass—that is, when you learn of any proposed attack of the Indians upon the town, you will warn me as soon as possible, before hand."

"Yas, gal, I'll do that, anyhow, on my own hook. Thar, now, run erlong back to camp, afore spooks get hold of you—or shall I accompany you?"

"Oh! no, you need not put yourself to that trouble," Angel answered, as she turned and hurried away.

McKandlass gazed after her, a strange gleam in his eyes.

"What the devil has that girl got in the mind camp, that she's so afraid and particular a bout?" he muttered. "It must be a mighty big secret, or she wouldn't care whether the blamed place went to the dogs or not. But, it won't make no difference ter Old Scowler. If he takes a notion to light down on the place, why nothin' couldn't stop him."

And giving a strange chuckle, as if there were something entertaining in the fact he had uttered, the Indian agent strode back down the gulch, and was soon lost to view, among the rocks.

Secret City was not much of a place, taken all in all.

There was a grocery, hardware and dry goods store combined, two saloons, in one of which was located the post-office; a smithy, and some fifty tents and shanties. This camp which Jacksion Bird had been the originator of, was located in a portion of the rugged valley where a soft sandy bottom took the place of the rocky one, and being locked in on all sides except one, by mighty mountain walls, the effect of a glance over the little collection of habitations from an elevated point, was decidedly picturesque.

The principal saloon and hostelry bore the peculiar sign of the "Red-Eye," painted over its doorway, and a very fat Dutchman holding a glass of lager in his hand.

As a miner—in rough patched pants and shirt, heavy boots and battered hat, and his face and head disguised with a shaggy, grizzled wig and beard—Deadwood Dick entered the town early in the evening after his interview with the girl stage-driver, and the Red-Eye being the first place of business on his way up the irregular street, he dropped in, with a curiosity to learn what was going on indoors, as he had as yet been able to discover only a couple of Chinamen out of doors.

Within the saloon, the aspect of affairs was entirely different.

The rude little apartment used as a bar-room was crowded with a mixture of dark-haired, villainous-looking men, and flat-faced, almond-eyed sons of Confucius, the numbers of either set of humans about corresponding.

All were talking, drinking and smoking; some were gambling at the bar, with dice, for the drinks; others were sleeping off the effects of too many potations in chairs, or curled up in the corners of the room.

They were an evil-looking set, these black-haired, bearded men, without exception.

Strong, overruling passions and hardened, brutal natures seemed photographed in every face; and their well-stocked belts of weapons told better than words the kind of men they were—who had as lief fight as eat.

All eyes were turned inquiringly upon Deadwood Dick, as he entered the saloon, and the general run of expressions were not friendly.

"I say, hello, pilgrim" one miner said, stepping forward, importantly. "Guess you're on ther wrong tack, ain't ye?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir," was the calm reply, and the keen eyes of the ex-road-agent fired a searching glance at his inquisitor. "In what way am I on the wrong tack, sir?"

"Oh! you're a stranger in town, an' as it ain't allowable ter be strangers, we hav ter order 'em ter take French leave, by direction of the king."

"Is that so?" Deadwood Dick inquired. "Who is this man king, pray?"

"The king of this golden valley, old hoss, is Frank Foster, and a bad man he is, too. He is high boss, an' when he wants his say, he generally gits it, or t'other party gits invited ter a funeral. Tain't long the king's been high, hear, but he's got the cemetery in a flourishing condition, I tell you."

"Oh! well, if he don't want me here, I'll take my departure as soon as I get ready," was Dick's retort, as he walked up to the bar and called for a cigar. "Smoke, gentlemen?"

The crowd looked surprised, and shook their heads, to a man.

"Oh! you needn't, if you don't feel incl'ned,

'pose you trot around your king and let me get a peep at him."

"That's precisely what we're going to do—we're going to trot you around to the king, that he can have the privilege of passin' sentence upon you," the first speaker said, with a savage laugh. "Come! throw up your hands and surrender."

"I'm in no particular hurry about that," Dick replied, as he calmly backed against the wall, and laid his hand upon a pair of revolvers. "I generally go about when and where I please, without dictation from any one, and if you don't believe it, why perhaps you'd better attempt to take me."

"Oh! you think you can bluff us, do ye?" the spokesman cried, angrily. "Well, my pilgrim o' Plymouth Rock, ye can't do et fer a cent. We've seen sech bantys as you, before, we hev; learned how to tame 'em, too. My name is Skuffy, and the b'yees heer will tell ye that I ain't no saint."

"I'll take the liberty to presume not—a saint would blush to resemble *you*," the ex-road-agent replied, sarcastically. "But be you saint or sinner, I'd advise you not to crowd me, or I shall be forced to add another dark spot to the face of a dark past. I warn you, fairly, that I am not harming any one, and will not surrender to any one man's will—or that of a hundred. Let me alone, and I'll let you alone; try to take me a prisoner, and I'll kill the first man who puts a foot forward to the attempt, and drop as many more as I conveniently can!"

Skuffy uttered an oath, and the rest of the roughs exchanged wondering but baleful glances.

Evident it was that men of Deadwood Dick's stuff were not often met with in Silver City, and the crowd were not blind to the fact that they had no child upon their hands to deal with.

"Cuss you! You'll sing a different song directly," Skuffy growled. "Again I order you to throw down your weapons and surrender!"

"And again I deliberately and emphatically refuse!" Deadwood Dick cried, sternly.

With a howl of rage Skuffy leaped forward, closely backed by his companions, toward the lone miner, bent on capturing him by the strength of overwhelming numbers.

But in this he miscalculated his man.

Crack! crack! went the revolver in the left hand of Deadwood Dick, and Skuffy staggered back and fell without a groan!

Crack! crack! crack! crack—four times then spitefully spoke the right hand revolver of the besieged, and down went as many more ruffians after their leader, dying or dead, as the case might be.

More yet would have fallen, as they rushed toward the brave ex-prince, had not a man at this moment dashed into the saloon. He gave a fierce yell that caused the ruffians to desist from their deadly purpose, for they halted, and stood as if half undecided what to do.

"Stop!" the new-comer cried, authoritatively, as he pushed forward. "What in the devil are you up to—Ah! what is this—a stranger here?"

And Frank Foster, for it was he, scowled at his disguised former captain.

"Yes, king, it's an old pilgrim who rolled in beer, jest now, and Skuffy was a tryin' to induce him to vamoose, when he up an' plugged it to Skuffy and four o' the boys, quicker'n lightnin'," one of the ruffians explained.

"Oho! so you're on your muscle, eh?" Foster demanded, savagely. "You no doubt have an idea, however, what I intend doing with you for the murder of these men?"

"Not the slightest—indeed I don't believe you will find it advisable to attempt to do anything with me," was Dick's calm answer, in a disguised voice. "Yonder on the floor lie five specimens of my handiwork. In case of provocation, I'm good for ten times as many. It is not murder I have done—it is killing in self-defense. They forced themselves upon me, after I had warned them to desist, and I accommodated them with just what they got. If there are any more anxious for like treatment, I'll hang out my shingle and make a business stand, right here!"

Cool were the words of the man—cooler was the tone and nonchalance of their delivery.

No party to get flustered at any embarrassment was he—a calm, calculating, self-possessed individual, on the contrary, to whom fear was a stranger, and enemies were merely nominal obstacles.

Foster surveyed him from head to foot critically, before replying; his anger was evidently deep-seated, but thoroughly under control.

"Perhaps you are not censurable for de-

fending yourself," he said, sternly; "yet you should not have disobeyed the orders of my men. This place belongs to me—the buildings and their contents, the gold mines, the men, women and children—all are mine, material, body and soul. And it pleases me that strangers shall not trespass in my little kingdom; consequently when they come they are subjected to imprisonment for life, in order that they shall not bear the news of this camp's existence to the outside world. You being no exception to the rule, you are virtually a prisoner, and will submit to arrest, without demur."

"Oh! I will, eh?" Deadwood Dick retorted, laconically. "You are sure of that?"

"Sure! Certainly I am. What do you mean?"

"I am rather doubtful—that is I am not so sure of it!"

"Sure of what—that you will not surrender?"

"That's about the photograph of it. I am not quite so sure that I will surrender at your will. Indeed, I am pretty positive that there will be a couple of dozen or more carcasses lying on the floor, there, fit for a coroner's inquest, first, which simple assertion evidences something of the style of a hairpin I am!"

A faint murmur of approval ran through the assembled crowd. The coolness of the stranger seemed winning favor rather than enmity.

"Curse your impudence!" Foster cried, fiercely. "By my soul, if I did not know better by the sight of my eyes, I could swear that you were an old friend of mine. No two men as cool as he, are often met with—yet you have the assurance of a mule—an ornery *burro*, sir. But, I'll take all that out of you—curse me for a coyote if I don't."

"I don't believe you there," Deadwood Dick responded, with a faint chuckle. "I'm like to an Asiatic lion—untamable. But, by the way, who is this individual whom I resemble, may I ask?"

"That is none of your business. What is your name, man?"

"None of your business, in return. Still, you may call me Soapy, if it suits you, or anything else that fits your ideas. As to who I really am, I have no doubt I am the identical party whom you recently mentioned as bearing a somewhat striking resemblance to me, as regards my personal traits of character."

"What! the devil, you say?"

"Well, no; not that dusky gentleman himself, but a devotee of his cause, say the ones who set themselves up as wise-acres!"

"Curse you—not Deadwood Dick!"

"Yes, old boy, Deadwood Dick at your service," and off came the false beard, and the keen, clear cut face of the ex-outlaw was revealed. "Ha! ha! Frank Foster. Met again, face to face!"

"A thousand furies!" the villain cried, stepping back. "You here. But it is well. The time for my vengeance has arrived. Seize him, boys, I command you!"

"Stop, pilgrims—I command you!" Dick cried, sternly. "I'm alone, but for all that I fear you not—a hundred times no. Come on if you dare—if you dare, mind you, and attempt to lay a hand on me, and as true as my name is Edward Harris, I'll fill your cowardly carcasses so full of lead that a dozen rubber balloons tied to your back won't keep you afloat as you cross the eternal river. Ready now!—come and see me!"

CHAPTER VII.

TO GO, OR STAY?—UP A TREE.

This time there was no precipitate rush. Dauntless and fearless, Deadwood Dick stood facing them, the cynical smile that shot from his eyes and lurked about his mouth, corresponding with the deadly glitter reflecting from his polished weapons, held firmly in either hand, and leveled unwaveringly at the crowd.

There was no movement, at all, among the roughs, over whom Frank Foster claimed to hold sway. They stood there, held at bay, by the will of one man.

"At him! at him, curse you!" Foster roared, infuriated at the hesitation of his tools. "That man is the outlaw and road-agent, Deadwood Dick, and a bitter enemy of mine, and I command you to take him alive."

"Ha! ha! yes, come and see me!" Deadwood Dick laughed. "I'll do the very best I can for you, boys."

But, even this enticement seemed to hold no charms for the ruffians.

"I guess ye better let out ther job o' takin' that salamander to some one else, king," one of the party said, shaking his head. "I've seen

some of his work, and I don't care to go the same way Skuffy did."

"Nor I!" agreed another.

"Nor I!" chimed in a chorus of voices, emanating from the larger part of the men in the bar-room.

Indeed, this sentiment seemed general.

"What! by the gods, am I to be disobeyed by my own men? At the outlaw, I say!" Foster fairly screamed, in a passion. "The first man who refuses, I'll blow his brains out!"

And out came a revolver, at full-cock, in a significant way, that caused the roughs to exchange glances.

"Hold on, Frank Foster—just have the kindness to restore your weapon to its belt!" Deadwood Dick ordered, sternly. "You have evidently forgotten that I have the honor of holding the drop! Attempt to blow out the brains of any of the men who refuse to wrestle with an earthquake, and off goes your spirit on an eternal flight. Oh! you need not doubt me, I think you know quite well that Deadwood Dick is a man of his word."

Foster stood glaring about him, white with rage. He was baffled at every turn, and knew not what to say or do, except give vent to a torrent of frightful oaths.

"Now, if you comprehend that I hold the game, Frank Foster, I'll talk business to you," the ex-road chief said, calmly. "We are enemies—that is flat. Moreover we are opponents in a little game of gold, and you hold the greatest number of tricks. But this shall not be so long. I've come here to clean you out, and I shall do it systematically, unless fates are against me. By that, I mean, we will toss up coppers to decide matters. Heads up, I remain in Secret City, so long as it may please me; tails up, I immediately and forever take my departure, promising to keep my lips sealed in regard to the existence of the place. As you cannot drive me out, nor buy me out, I daresay you will see the good sense of accepting my offer!"

"Curse you! curse you! curse you!" Foster gritted, savagely. "If I could get at you, I'd crush the life out of your worthless carcass."

"But you can't, you see," Deadwood Dick taunted, "and even if you could, you'd have to have the hug of a grizzly to accomplish your purpose. I'm a bad man to buck against."

"Yes, king, you'd better take him at his offer," one of the roughs advised—whose name was Carling—"for a snake got rid of is better'n a snake tamed, any day."

"Yes, you're right, man. I will toss up, to decide this matter, and I'll win, too. If heads is up, Deadwood Dick is not to be molested by any of you; if tails is up, he is to get out of town within an hour. Sir Outlaw, who shall toss the copper?"

"I'll leave that to you," Dick replied. "If you lose, it will then be your own fault, and you can vent your spite on yourself."

"Then, Carling, you may toss. Here is an old-fashioned copper cent, with a head on one side, and a shield on the other. The shield will be tails. Toss it up, so that it strikes the ceiling, and let it fall to the floor. Then pick it up, and see which is uppermost—heads or tails."

"Hold on—not quite so fast, if you please, Mr. Foster," Dick said, calmly. "Your man, Carling, will have the goodness not to touch the copper after it strikes the floor, until I have seen which side is up!"

"Oho! you're suspicious of treachery, eh?" Foster growled, savagely.

"Yes. I always suspect a man, in a moderate way, until I see him proven above suspicion."

"Then, go ahead, Carling. Let it be as he says. No one need touch the coin until all are satisfied which side is uppermost."

Carling took the copper and examined it a moment as if studying how to toss it so that it would turn up to his satisfaction, the crowd in the meantime surging nearer, to watch the result.

Then, after a moment of suspense, up went the miner's right arm with a swift motion, and the copper struck the ceiling with a ring, then fell to the floor and rolled directly in front of Deadwood Dick, and stopped.

It took but a glance to apprise the ex-road-agent that he had—won!

For the head side of the copper was facing upward!

A murmur of astonishment escaped the crowd while fierce curses broke from the lips of both Carling and Frank Foster.

"Thanks to your kindness, friend Carling," Deadwood Dick said, triumphantly. "The first time I find a nickel rolling up hill, I'll make you

a present of it as a reward of merit. Ha! ha! ha! By the way, King Foster, am I to have my undisputed liberty?"

"Until you stick your nose in my business, yes," was the reply. "I always do as I agree."

"That is a lie; but then, let it pass. As for protruding my nasal appendage into your affairs I shall consult my own notion about that. If the aforesaid appendage, however, should blockade your passage, I advise that you attempt to spurn it aside by the administration of a pair of fists."

Foster turned away without a reply, and called for whisky, at the bar.

He was beaten, and chose evidently to bear it as best he could.

Restoring his revolvers to his belt, Deadwood Dick sauntered about the saloon, a while, and then quitted it, for the street—or the space between the shanties and tents which might have been meant for a public thoroughfare.

As he did so, he came face to face with Angel Arnot, who was walking hurriedly along.

She stopped, with a startled exclamation, as she saw him.

"You here, and not disguised?" she articulated, in surprise.

"Exactly," he replied. "I've conquered the lion, and won my freedom—that is, I tossed coppers with Frank Foster to see whether I was to stay, or go, and the result is—I am going to stay."

"Good! I am glad," Angel replied, eagerly. "A few such men as you in Secret City would bring about better order. There is going to be music directly, however."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that ere many suns rise and set, there'll be a band of miners in here who will not recognize Foster as boss."

"Ah! say you so? Then I am glad, for perhaps I can find friends among them. But, if you will tell me where I'll find Miss Lola Bird, I'll not detain you!"

"You are going to see her?"

"Yes, if I do not find too many obstacles in the way."

"Look out for Foster. If he were to catch you there, he'd kill you!"

"Oh! would he? Well, I am not so sure of that. I was never killed but once—then I got hung. But, I recovered, shortly afterward. The residence of Miss Bird is yonder, eh?—in the most pretentious of all the shanties?"

"Yes."

"I thought as much. You can generally look to find a fine bird in a good cage. Good-evening to you."

"Good-evening," the girl said, as she hurried away.

Dick gazed after her, until she had vanished in the darkness; then he sauntered down the street, and out of the village, on the northern side.

"I scarcely know whether I better attempt to see the girl, to-night, or not. Maybe now is my best chance, and maybe it isn't. I shouldn't like to spoil Foster's head, which I should have to do, if it came to a meeting, and a row."

Just outside of the town, he stopped in under the shade of a large tree, and sat down, to think—for he was not the old-time Deadwood Dick, with a ready fund of lightning thought, tonight.

For some time he sat, absorbed in deep reverie, until he was aroused by a hoarse, deep voice, in the neighborhood.

The voice was not far off, either, and called, inquiringly:

"Hello! Scowler—are you there?"

"Wagh!" a guttural voice replied, from an opposite direction—evidently that of an Indian. Then Deadwood Dick heard footsteps approaching from both points of the compass, and concluded that the twain would meet just in under the tree where he was sitting.

"This won't do," he muttered. "Either I've got to vanoose, or be discovered. I've a kind of a curiosity to know what these two parties are meeting for, at this late hour. So I believe I'll shin the tree, and comm'n the atrocious sin of playing eavesdropper."

To act was to follow thought, with Deadwood Dick, and jumping up and catching hold of a lower limb, he drew himself up into the tree, with the greatest of ease.

He was scarcely comfortably ensconced, when the two new-comers met beneath the tree, and shook hands.

One was a burly, black-whiskered individual; the other an Indian, decorated in war-paint, and attired in a suit of buckskin, while his head-gear consisted of a tuft of hair stuck full of wild turkey feathers.

That the two had met before was evident. After shaking hands, each took a swig from a long-necked bottle that the black-whiskered man produced, and then seated themselves on the grass, beneath the outreaching branches of the tree.

A small moon soared in the blue dome of Heaven, and cast a faint, spectral light upon the earth, and upon the two crouching figures.

By this light, Deadwood Dick was enabled to see them from his place of concealment, as well as though he had been on the ground.

"Well, Scowler, what's the word?" the black-whiskered man queried, as he lit his pipe. "How has things went since I saw you last?"

"Bad!" the Indian replied, in unbroken English. "There's been nothing to keep a feller awake, in camp. The braves are getting ugly from an impatience to get hold of a victim on whom to do barber work. Have you seen the girl stage-driver?"

"Yes—to-night."

"And got the swag?"

"Yes—all she had, so she said."

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars!"

"Bah! a paltry sum."

"Best I could do, tho'. When ye can't git no more whisky outen a bar'l, what ye goin' to do?"

"Squeeze it," the red-man said, laconically.

Then both men laughed boarishly.

"I'm afraid a feller'd git hold of a catty-mound, ef he was ter try squeezin' the Angel," the white man averred, grimly.

"Yet I've made up my mind to make her the queen of my wigwam," the chief declared, with a nod of his feathered head. "She'd make an ornament to my lodge, McKandlass."

"Jest like you'll make an ornament fer a pine box, some fine mornin', if ye get her," the ruffian chuckled. "Better let her alone, Scowler. I've seen more o' her than you, an' I tell ye she's an earthquake, all by herself. Why 'twasn't only about a week ago she plugged Jim Lake through the cheek, 'cause he winked at her, an' only yesterday she slapped Max Mosher across the mouth for offerin' to kiss her—slapped him right off his feet, wi' one blow, jest as purty as ye please. Ohi! you can have 'r ef ye want her—I don't. I know what it is—orfer, anyhow, when my wife, Sal, us'ter black my eyes once a week, reg'lar. You bet!"

Scowler uttered a guttural grunt of disapproval.

"You were a fool," he said; "I am not. I can soon tame the gal, once I get her to camp. And, as for the mining town yonder, my braves only want a minute's notice to pounce down an' make sausage-meat of it."

"I don't believe it'll be best to do it," McKandlass said, thoughtfully. "The mines are pannin' out rich, but not so rich as they will, bymeby, when they get 'em thoroughly opened. As none of the filthy leaves the town I don't see why we should be in a hurry, as it's all ours, in the long run."

"Yes, that's so; but ef there should happen wind of it to git outside, you'd see an inflation of miners. Then we'd have to fight, and like as not git licked in the bargain. Now, it's all easy enough to butcher what few there is."

Deadwood Dick shuddered, as he listened. Such a straightforward exhibition of heartlessness he had never seen or heard equaled.

"I'll risk the inflation," McKandlass said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and refilling and lighting it. "Fer my part, I don't keer a cuss how soon the folk are scalped an' got rid of, 'cept for the gal, Angel. She's got a secret tucked away in her buzzom, or else it's up at the shanty where she hangs out, and she's fearful anxious that no harm don't cum to the town. That's how she cum to fork over the filthy."

"What is the secret?"

"Cussed ef I know; ner hev I got any idea. Sumthin' big, er she wouldn't keer a cuss how things went, I reckon."

"Humph. Find out what the secret is. I've got a notion to know."

"Then, all you've got to do, is go find out for yourself; I'm no waiter."

"Bah! curb your temper. We can't afford to be enemies, although I allow it would do us a heap of good to cut each other's throats, just to try the temper of our knives. By the way, what has become o' Jack Bird?"

"Gone to glory, I reckon," was the laconic reply.

"Anyhow, he hasn't turned up. The feller Foster is runnin' things pretty much his own way, an' the miners tow around better fer him than they do fer Bird."

"What's become of the gal?"

"Twixt you an' me, Scowler, I don't know. That's a critter housed up in Bird's shebang, but ef she's the same 'un as allus used ter ride thru the gulch wi' Bird, on hossback, I've lost my reckonin'."

"What! you don't think there's been a change, Jeb?"

"Waal, I do!" the black-whiskered man averred. "My old optics ar' gettin' along in years, I'll allow, but they ain't easy fooled on a gal."

"But, what do you think? Has there been shenanigan?"

"That's my idea. Et looks to me as if Bird's gal had been smuggled off, and this new party smuggled in. An' ef sech is the case, hyar's what'll go a hull heat, in two-forty, in seein' things set back shipshape."

"And, that's precisely my fix, pilgrims!"

The two men leaped to their feet, with ejaculations of surprise.

From out of the branches of the tree a figure had dropped, and Deadwood Dick stood smilingly before them.

"Them's my sentiments to a capital 'T,' gentlemen," he continued, "and if you want to shake hands on it, give us a paw, without claws!"

CHAPTER VIII.

UNWILLING SLAVES—LITTLE TOOTHPICK.

The sudden descent of Deadwood Dick had thoroughly startled the red-skin and the white ruffian, and their hands flew, by force of habit, to their belts, in quest of weapons."

"Oh! you needn't trouble yourselves," Dick assured, coolly. "Weapons won't do me any harm, I'll guarantee. Why, my dear friends, you've not got a chunk of lead about your effects strong enough to force an entrance into my system."

"Humph! we'll see about that!" McKandlass cried, sourly. "Jest stand whar you ar', and give's your handle."

"Correct. My handle is Deadwood Dick."

"Deadwood Dick?"

"That's what I said—Deadwood Dick."

"But, surely, you ain't ther same frisky cuss who used to perambulate up in the Black Hills?"

"Guess I am the ha'rpin," Dick replied, with a smile. "Leastway, I've had all the credit of it, and the discredit, too."

"Well, wot ye doin' down this country?" McKandlass demanded, gruffly. "Et ain't a healthy locale fer hoss-thieves and road-agents."

"How is it you two precious rascals are subliriatin' so finely here, then?" Dick retorted. "But, laying aside all by talk—I've come down here on business. A few weeks ago, I met a fellow in Denver, named Jackson Bird—or, at least, such he claimed was his name."

"He gambled excessively; he had a pile and lost it. Then, in a fit of desperation, he offered to wager a paper against a sum of money—the paper was a guide to the Secret City yonder, and it was also understood that the paper mortgaged away all right and title to these mines and everything in the locate even to Bird's own daughter, to whomsoever should present the paper, after Bird's death."

The game was played between Bird and one Frank Foster, who formerly had belonged to my band of road-agents, and Foster won—by a sly trick, which he thought no one had observed. But I had seen it.

"When Bird came to look for his paper, it was gone. Then there was a row, and Bird was shot. I escaped with him, and bore him to a deserted house, near by, where he died. Before his death, however, I told him that I had found the missing paper, in the street, a few hours before, and he bade me keep it, and come here and take the place it assigned to me, rather than that Foster should do so. I consented, all except to marrying the girl, whom I proposed to give as much liberty as she had always enjoyed. After Bird was dead, I went to my hotel, intending to start the next morning for Secret City, on my errand. During the night, however, my papers were stolen, and I was disarmed of my power to find this place. I came on, however, and have succeeded in finding it after a long hunt."

"But what is all this, to us?" McKandlass demanded, impatiently. "Ef ye got beat, it's none o' our bizness."

"Of course not, but, I've got some propositions to offer, just the same," Deadwood Dick replied. "I overheard you in your conversation a bit ago, remark that you did not believe the girl at the Bird cabin is the original canary

of Jackson Bird's rearing. Now, just such an idea popped into my head, not long ago, and without any cause, whatever. But the more I think about it, the more I believe that Foster has put the real heiress out of the way, and substituted another to fill the position more to his satisfaction. Therefore, we must give the matter proper investigation, and if we have been correct in our surmises, we must oust the impostor, and find the real heiress, and restore her to her rightful position."

"We!" McKandlass ejaculated.

"We!" Scowler grunted.

"Yes you—ourselves combined. Don't argue against my will, for it's useless. I'm king—you're only a pair of knaves, who must do my bidding."

Both men haw-hawed, outright.

To them the idea was preposterous.

The idea of their playing second fiddle to the lead of Deadwood Dick was something they had never thought of—something they regarded as ridiculous.

"Well, if you ain't the cheekiest fellow out, I'll lose my guess," McKandlass chuckled. "Why, how in thunder, man, kin you make us do as you want, ag'in' our will?"

"Oh! that is easy enough," Deadwood Dick said, confidently. "I'll explain what may seem a mystery to you. As a mortal I was gifted by my Maker with a magnetic eye. Indeed, I have conceit to believe that no other human being can compare with me in that respect. While we have been speaking, I have mesmerized you both, to a certain extent, without your knowledge—and so that you are under my control. It has all been done with the aid of my eyes, and power of my mind, over yours."

"Bah!" McKandlass growled, a startled expression coming over his face. "You lie, you cuss."

"Do, I?" Dick replied, coolly. "Well, maybe I do. Better try and see if you can move your hands."

More surprised than ever, the ruffian and his painted companion did try, and curses of rage and astonishment escaped them when they discovered, true enough, that they were powerless to move a muscle or stir either hand or arm.

"Ah! why don't you strike out?" the ex-road-agent prince commented, with a provoking laugh. "Find yourselves as inoffensive as a pair of chickens, don't you? Thought you would. Can't walk, either, can you?"

No, they couldn't stir a foot, try though as they would. By the same mysterious power that Deadwood Dick had rendered their hands powerless, he had also chained their lower limbs fast.

"Well, I'll be cussed," McKandlass growled. "You're possessed of the devil, pilgrim."

"If the thought is consoling to you, I shall not gainsay it. Indeed, maybe the old gent and I are related—there's no telling. Now, what do you think about matters, my worthy subjects? Looks as if I held a full hand, don't it?"

"Yas, you've got the game now, but, cuss ye, jest wait till I get free, an' I'll soon spring a leak in your system, wot'll fix you all right, fer a voyage."

"Bah! I see you are ignorant," Dick replied. "Why, man, after I throw you out of this mesmeric state, you are even more in my power than before. One glance from my eye will then be sufficient to stop you stock-still, and hold you a prisoner, until I choose to wave my hand and set you again in motion. If I see you fifty yards away, and catch a glance of your eye, that is all that is required. By my request you will find it convenient to lie down in the dirt, creep on all fours, or do whatsoever I may direct. Utterly in my yower, you must sooner or later realize that I am in truth your master."

The two villains gazed at each other in a dubious, doubtful way.

The red-skin was more composed than the Indian agent, but, there was a gleam of alarm in his eyes.

"Well, what do you want of us?" McKandlass demanded, surly. "If you ain't lyin' to us, I s'pose we'll have to knuckle under. But, mind, we'll slip a knife between your ribs, the first opportunity we git."

"Oh! that will be all right. If you catch me off my guard, you are welcome to do your worst. Look! do you see this?"

Both men uttered cries of astonishment.

Deadwood Dick held in his hand a nugget of pure gold, as big as a goose egg!

"Thunder and lightning!" McKandlass gasped.

"Whar ye git that?"

"None of your business," Deadwood Dick replied. "I found it, where there is more of the same kind. This nugget weighs eighteen ounces,

pure gold. Now, then, I'll tell you what I'll do. You are a pair of unprincipled scoundrels, with hearts of less measure than the most savage brute; still, I am going to make you an offer. You are to both enter my service, body and soul, and work for my sole interests, and precisely as I may direct, for the next four months. You are to do nothing on your own accounts or for yourselves—you are to commit no crimes—do no villainy, whatever, but adhere to my directions and consider your time no one else's but mine. If you will do all this, and faithfully follow such directions as I shall give you, at the expiration of the time named, I will deliver to you the directions where to find the place in which I discovered this nugget, and will also give you two hundred dollars apiece."

"You sw'ar to this?"

"Yes, a dozen times, if necessary, if you perform your parts."

"What d'y'e want us ter do?"

"One thing—I want you to assist me in finding Miss Bird and restoring her to her rightful position, and ousting the party who now usurps her place—another, you are to fight for me, a'd in my behalf, if necessary, and leave the girl Angel Arnot alone, without attempting to molest her, or attempt to pry into any secrets she may have!"

"Hain't you goin' to give a feller a chance to spill a little gore, just to keep his hand in?" McKandlass demanded, with a wolfish grin.

"No! you infernal ruffian. No blood shall be spilled, unless it is in defense of life. Come, what do you say? I have no time to parley."

"Dunno about it," the Indian-agent replied, dubiously. "What d'y'e think, Scowler? Kin we afford ter play up honest fer four long months, fer only a trifle of fifty dollars a month?"

"Reckon et ain't enough," the noble red-man said. "Honesty is at a premium now-a-days, an' he wot wants it, must expect ter pay fer it."

"Not a cent more than I have offered!" Deadwood Dick said, firmly.

"The mines I shall send you to, are yet unknown, except by me, and are unworked, and worth a fortune. Take my offer, or let it alone, as you will. If you refuse, I'll throw you into a deeper mesmeric state from which you'll never awaken, except in the hereafter. I am waiting for your answer."

"Waal, I reckon I'm willin', ef Scowler is," the Indian-agent said, doubtfully.

"Willing or unwilling, we'll accept your terms," the Indian said, "an' we'll honestly an' faithfully work according to your directions. And ef ye don't keep your promises, after we've done our part, we'll set my band of howling reds upon you, an' see if you can mesmerize them, afore they get a grip on your scalp."

"You need not fear," Deadwood Dick replied. "I always keep my promises. Now, then, I must be going. To-morrow, I will interview the Bird whom Frank Foster has in his cage, and ef it don't strike me that she is the right bird for the position, we'll hunt up the right one. You'll find me at one of the hotels, to-morrow night."

"All right. We'll be thar."

Then, Deadwood Dick waved his hand and backed out of the presence of the two ruffians until he lost sight of them, when he turned his footsteps back toward Secret City.

"Maybe I'll get fooled, in having anything to do with those unruly cusses, but I've an idea I can make them work," he muttered. "If I can sufficiently interest them in my behalf, by the promise of gold, I am all right. And now for somewhere to lay my head till morning, when I'll pay the bogus Bird a visit, and see what kind of a song she'll sing. Ah! Frank Foster, this is a bold game you are playing, but if you are not sharper than I think you are, you'll get beat!"

The hotel accommodations of Secret City were not extensive, consisting of two saloons, which furnished board and lodging to their patrons, up-stairs, providing said patrons had a \$3.00 per day with which to liquidate. No second Leadville was this secluded golden camp, yet, but its prices were as though it was that metropolis. Not fancying the idea of putting up at the establishment where he had had the row with the miners, Deadwood Dick bided himself to the other saloon, and was about to enter his name in the register upon the bar-counter, when the keeper, a red-nosed Hibernian, interposed.

"Whist, now! Would ye be after lettin' the book alone, bad luck to yez!" he said, insolently, as he stood facing Dick on the opposite side of the bar. "Phat cheek yez have, sure, onny-

how, to be writhin' yer name forinst another man's books."

"Oh! excuse me," Deadwood Dick said, apologetically, "but you see I took that for the register."

"An' so it is tha registar, but phat in the devil would you be puttin' your name down there for?"

"Why, I want to be accommodated with lodgin' and breakfast, sir."

"Devil a bit of aither will ye be after gettin' here, shure."

"Ah! full, eh?"

"Bad luck to your impudence—I never git full, at all."

"I mean, is your house full?"

"Devil a won in it, meself an' me ould woman excepted."

"Then, confound, it, man, why is it, you can't take me in, and give me lodgin' and breakfast?" Dick demanded.

"Och! howly Moses! Phat for would I be breakin' the king's orders, shure? Didn't he coome to tha likes o' meself, an' be after sayin', 'Dennis, ye devil, of a stranger do coome an' apply for anything in your line, do ye refuse 'im, an' give 'im a bounce, or I'll come down an' cut yer cussed head ontirely off.' An' may I see St. Patrick's spirit in me next glass o' red-eye if I don't obey orders!"

Deadwood Dick gave a whistle of surprise.

"So Foster is showing his cloven foot, eh?" he muttered, with a frown. "Well, it is nothing new for him. But, I say, old Emerald, supposing I was to slip a ten-dollar gold-piece into your paw—couldn't you store me away for the night?"

"Devil a time, yer honor. You see as how the king be the boss, an' we hev to go by his orders."

"All right. You're not to blame, for being a fool, maybe. I'll try elsewhere."

Leaving the saloon, he stood for a moment undecided what course to pursue.

"It won't be healthy to try and get lodgin' anywhere in this town, I reckon," he mutterred. "And as the night is warm, I'll make my bed beneath the sky. It won't be the first time Deadwood Dick has hugged *terra firma*, either."

Again seeking the outskirts of the town, he selected a grassy spot in the shadow of a large boulder and stretched himself out to rest.

After an undisturbed rest of several hours, he was wakened by something he knew not what, until he discovered that it was daylight, and also that he was not alone.

A person sat upon the rock, just in front of him, gazing down upon him, curiously—a man, evidently, but the possessor of a girlish figure in male attire, with a slouch hat upon his head, and a mask upon the face, through which a pair of eyes gleamed, piercingly.

And this was the person who had rescued Deadwood Dick from the old house in one of the by-streets of Denver—Little Toothpick.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS BIRD.

"You here?" exclaimed Dick, springing to his feet, in surprise.

"I seem to be," was the reply. "Is there any thing surprising in the fact?"

"To me, yes. I left you in Denver."

"And I followed you here, not far in the distance."

"Humph! If you met with the same experiences I did, I must admire your pluck and perseverance. Why did you come?"

"Because I chose. As your valet, I presume I wouldn't be of much use to you—I in Denver and you here."

"Well, I dare say not. But I really have no use for a valet, under present circumstances, and encompassed as I am by danger, constantly, it is not safe for a girl here in Secret City, and I advise your return to Denver."

"A girl, you say?"

"Yes, a girl, for such I am satisfied you are, attempting to pass yourself off for a boy. It won't work, however."

"What right have you to think that I am not what I appear?" was the next query.

"Oh, as to that, I had a dream that you were a girl in disguise. Besides, your whole appearance betrays femininity."

"Ha! ha! that is the first time I ever heard any one say that. Maybe I'd better adorn myself in feminine attire, if I'd make a better-looking girl than I do a boy. Don't you think so, eh? But don't for a moment think me a girl, or you'll be awfully fooled. If you don't want

a valet, why, it is immaterial to me, as I can get other positions. By-by. I'll see you some other time."

And dropping to the ground, the Toothpick sauntered leisurely toward the town.

Deadwood Dick did not immediately follow. He sat upon the ground and watched Little Toothpick, a studious expression upon his handsome face.

"Maybe I'm wrong," he said, "but it strikes me mighty strong that yonder party is a girl, despite the denial. There is a mystery about him—or her, whichever it is—to, that I cannot quite solve. By Jove! I don't want to get too many mysteries aboard my craft, or there'll be a swamp-collapse for sure! The next important thing to do is to get an interview with the Bird whom I believe to be usurping another bird's cage. Just how I shall accomplish my desire I cannot quite see, but a way will soon turn up, doubtless."

Awhile later, he made his way into the camp, and strolled about, leisurely, but independently, as though the place were his own individual property.

The miners who were at work regarded him with curious glances, and more than one scowled at his approach, but scowled in vain, as he paid them not the least attention.

During his strolling, the ex-road chief kept a close watch upon the shanty habitation which had formerly been the residence of the ill-fated gambler, Jackson Bird.

It was a rough barn-like, battened-frame two-story building with a front and side entrance below, and several windows. Yet though rough it was, it was much the superior in appearance, of any of the other buildings in Secret City.

But, watch though he did, Deadwood Dick saw nothing of particular moment, or anything that interested him.

About noon, as he was standing near the first saloon, where he had previously been refused lodging, Frank Foster left the Bird mansion, and walked rapidly down the street.

He stopped, with a frown, as he came opposite the cool ex-road-agent.

"Ah! you here, yet? Have you not seen enough, so that you can afford to get out?"

"Oh! no," Dick replied, tantalizingly. "I am so taken up with what I have seen of the secret camp, that I have half a notion to take up my permanent abode here. I so admire the hotel accommodations."

"Oh! I had no doubt you would," Foster replied, maliciously. "I planned so that your visit should prove one of pleasure. But, laying aside joking, I want to know what you intend to do?"

"Oh! just as I please, as a matter of course. You know that is second nature to me."

"But that isn't a-going to work here, and I'll tell you for your own good, and laying aside all enmity on my part, that you'd better skip out while you've got your freedom."

"You don't mean to say that you are really so philanthropic as to make that suggestion for my benefit?" Dick exclaimed, sarcastically.

"For your benefit alone. It matters not in particular, to me, whether you remain or not, as you cannot do me any harm. But my boys—and a queer lot of boys they are, too—haven't taken any notion to you, and are studying mischief, and if you do not make yourself scarce soon, I anticipate that they will find it necessary to invite you to a lynch pic-nic, or neck-tie party, in which instance I cannot interfere. I merely make these remarks for your personal welfare—not that I am at all interested, understand you; oh! no. Good-day, sir, good-day!"

And with a villainous laugh he hurried on.

"Exactly—good-day, Mr. Foster," Deadwood Dick muttered, gazing after him. "Many thanks for your warning. One would say you are more concerned for my welfare than I am myself. But, you can't deceive me—not in the least. I have been a student of human character too long, to get badly taken in by a pilgrim of your denomination. I wonder where you are aiming for?"

Foster soon left the camp, and Deadwood Dick's eyes trailed him until he entered a piece of timber, beyond the town.

Then with a chuckle of satisfaction, Dick sauntered up the street toward the Bird shanty.

"Now is my time," he muttered, "to seek an interview with whatsoever female I may find in the place, be she a dragon, Venus, or Cleopatra. Wonder how I am going to get in?"

Hastily ever at fault, he now quickly hit upon a plan of attack.

Quickening his footsteps, he walked briskly toward the Bird shanty, as Foster might have done had he been in a hurry, and mounting the

steps, two at a time, he tried the door and found it locked.

"Let me in, cuss it!" he cried, shaking the door, fiercely, "D'y'e hear, you lazybones?" There was a moment of silence—then footsteps were audible within, and the door was unbarred, and flung wide open.

Without awaiting an invitation, Deadwood Dick boldly entered the shanty, and closed the door behind him, placing his back against it.

For he stood in the presence of the very person he had come to see, evidently—a fair-haired young girl of seventeen or eighteen years, who was the possessor of some beauty, of face and form, but was far from the beautiful creature Jackson Bird had declared his daughter to be.

She was attired in a dark plain dress, and her hair was combed back and fell in an unconfined wave over her shoulders.

"Sir!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing with indignation, as she saw the action of Deadwood Dick—"what means this intrusion?"

"Oh! I've been watching my chance to get an interview with you, when Foster was absent, and have embraced this opportunity. Don't be alarmed, as I come from your father!"

"My father, sir."

"That's what I said, I believe."

"But, my father is dead?"

"Exactly. No one ought to be better aware of the fact, than I, since I happened to be the only party who was with him, in his last moments."

"You—you!" the girl cried, in evident excitement.

"Oh! are you telling the truth?"

"I am speaking the truth, miss, and it was by your father's request that I am here."

"Oh! sir, then you are welcome—doubly welcome. Be seated, please, and tell me of my father—my poor, erring father."

And the pretty face became buried in the handkerchief in her hands.

"You mourn his absence, then?" Deadwood Dick asked, seating himself.

"Oh! so much! He was ever good and kind to me."

"Well, I'll relate what I have to relate in a very few words," Dick said, "and you will see why I am here."

He accordingly did relate the substance of what is already known to the reader, in as few words as possible.

"So you see the man, Foster, by theft got here before I did, and the deuce knows what he has not done, in the way of villainy."

"Sir, I cannot credit this story," Miss Bird said, gazing thoughtfully at the floor. "It seems impossible to me. Mr. Foster came to me with papers, which by an understanding between me and my father, I recognized as a mortgage of everything in Secret City, including myself, to the bearer of the said paper. As to your statement, I cannot believe that you ever had possession of this paper, but should quicker believe that you, somehow, obtained a clew of the matter, and proposed to run a little game of your own."

"Humph! a very complimentary opinion to have of a fellow, I must confess," Deadwood Dick said, dryly. "But, then, it chances to be about equal to the one I hold of you—n'mely, that you are not the real Lola Bird, but are the impostor whom I believe Frank Foster has substituted in place of the genuine. There! to use the vernacular slang, you are at liberty to put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Sir! you shall repent for this insult. You shall be severely punished for it!" the girl cried, sternly, her face flushing with anger.

"Perhaps—perhaps not," Dick coolly replied. "It takes a man to punish me. But, maybe you've got some men here in Secret City capable of doing the job up brown, but I've yet to get a glimpse of them. As for your villainous champion, Foster, if you want to see him prepared for a photograph of a vanquished prize-fighter, send him around, and I'll do a good job, or not charge a cent's worth of satisfaction."

"Sir! you are the most impudent person I ever met. Leave my house, or I will call for assistance!"

"When I enter your house, and am ordered out, I will go!" was the ex-road-agent's calm answer. "At present, I am in the house of Miss Lola Bird, and here by her father's orders, and shall not leave until I am ready."

"And you still dare to insinuate that I am not myself?"

"Oh! no. You are yourself, no doubt, but you are not Lola Bird!"

"I am! I am!"

"I say you are not, miss."

"You lie, sir!"

A Game of Gold.

"If I do, may I never be a second George Washington," was Dick's retort.

"You lie—you lie!" the girl repeated, frantically. "I am the real Lola Bird, and the only heiress to all Secret City. You are a bold, bad man, but you shall not cheat me out of what is rightfully my own."

"I have no desire to cheat Miss Bird of a farthing, my dear lady; indeed, I came here to tender her any assistance she might need, and it was my intention to deliver up to her the strange paper that had fallen into my possession, and thereby render her sole heiress, and bound to no one. But, I am impressed with the idea that I have not seen Miss Bird, and believing that there has been foul work here, I propose to make an investigation. If you are wise, you will throw up a bad game, and make a clear confession, which will restore the rightful heiress to what belongs to her."

"Never! never! I am Lola Bird, and have nothing to confess. You think to drive me, but you will be disappointed. I shall inform Mr. Foster about you, when he returns."

"Do so. State to him that by calling, I hoped to have the opportunity to pull his nose, but if he will call on me, at any seasonable hour, I will punch it for him. Good-day; I am going, now. Don't be angry at me for interfering in this matter, as I am simply looking after the welfare of one whom I have sworn to befriend."

Then, with a low laugh, Dick made his exit from the shanty, leaving behind him an infuriated woman, whose rage was photographed in the deathly pallor of her face, and the wicked gleam of her eyes.

While Deadwood Dick sauntered back down the street, a hard set look upon his face.

"I am more satisfied now, than ever, that she is an impostor. But, where can Foster have picked her up? She holds her own well for one so young, but she cannot deceive me. The next thing is to hunt up the real Bird, and place her back in her cage. It will not be an easy matter, I fancy, but must be done. Hello! Yonder is the Angel!"

He saw her as he glanced toward a neighboring shanty. She was sitting upon the steps, engaged in perusing a book, but the instant she saw him, she arose, and hurriedly entered the shanty and closed the door behind her. Which act gave Dick a second surprise.

"So I've got another cut, eh? Well, I'll get used to this thing, by and by, and not mind it. I think I'll understand this matter, after awhile. Angel Arnot, as she calls herself, has a secret in that cabin or shanty, and she guards it closely. Sooner or later, however, it will leak out."

The afternoon was warm and breathless in the little valley. The sky was unclouded, and the sun poured down with burning intensity. Even the miners were lazy at their work, as they toiled in the sand.

After a successful attempt to procure lunch at the grocery, Dick wandered off to the shade of the grove, which bordered the northern side of the camp, and lay down upon the grass.

Something wonderful for him, he soon fell asleep, and slept till—he woke with a start, to find the sun pouring down its heat, a good two hours nearer the eastern horizon than when he had last seen it.

An exclamation of surprise escaped him, as he rubbed his eyes and glanced first at his watch, and then around him.

During the period of his slumbers, there had been a change—a change almost as incredible to him as that which greeted old Rip Van Winkle when he awoke after his twenty years' snooze.

The glance at his watch revealed to Deadwood Dick that it was eleven o'clock in the forenoon, now, where it had been two, at least, in the afternoon, when he went to sleep!"

A glance toward the camp disclosed something else.

The street was full of people—men, women and children—of horses and yelping dogs, and white-topped wagons. Not a few, but a great many, and the very fact was indicative of one certainty, namely—that Secret City was stormed by a horde of stampedes, to whom word of the golden riches in the forbidden territory had in some way been communicated.

"And it means that there'll be fun for awhile, and that Foster's days of tyranny are over," Dick at once concluded. "I must have slept from yester afternoon, until now, too, although I can swear that I have had none of the dwarf schnapps that did the biz for old Rip of the Catskills. Guess I'll waltz over and see how Foster enjoys this little pic-nic. Bet he is as mad as a Fourth-of-July hornet, when all the lemonade is gone. Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER X.

A BELLIGERENT ANGEL AND A NEW-COMER.
WE pass over a week, and once more glance down upon the town or camp known as Secret City.

A great change indeed, has taken place. Larger by half is the village in the golden gulch, and the streets are full of people hurrying to and fro.

Deadwood Dick came sauntering down the street, just at the edge of evening, and dropped into the "Red-Eye," for a cigar.

After procuring what he wanted, and lighting it, he turned and saw a couple of men seated at a table in one corner, and went over to them.

They were Jeb McKandlass, the Indian agent, and his associate, old Scowler.

"Well, what have you learned?" Dick demanded, inquiringly.

"Waal, we've learned one thing," McKandlass said, with a grin—"that is, that it's tougher to live an honest existence than it is a rough one. But we've stuck to our quill, an' don't ye fergit it."

"Which is right. I dare say you are in a better condition, take it all around. But, what about our Bird—have you learned nothing concerning her?"

"Not a thing. I reckon you're runnin' a wrong trail, Boss. Guess the gal what Foster's got is ther genywine article, every day in the week."

"You cannot make me swallow that idea," Dick replied. "The real Lola Bird is at present put away, but I am bound to find her. Foster leaves town every two or three days, and goes to where the girl is concealed, undoubtedly, and I want you to make it your business to watch and follow him. In this way we may be able to learn what cannot easily be learned any other way."

"Karect, capt'in. We'll obey orders. Ef we happen to find the gal, shall we fetch her to you?"

"By all means; but, hold her outside of town, and one of you come and inform me. I would not have her brought here, yet; it might be bad for her safety."

Then, the ex-Prince of the Road passed out.

As he gained the street, a person touched him on the arm. A glance proved it to be the masked creature, girl or boy—Little Toothpick.

"Stop!" he said. "Don't interrupt me. What is the girl, Angel Arnot, to you?"

"Nothing that I am aware of," Dick replied, in surprise. "Why?"

"Because, she is in trouble. Look yonder."

He did look toward the girl Jen's shanty, and saw a crowd of men, women and children before it—a rough, boisterous, clamorous mob of irate humanity.

Angel Arnot was at an open window, upstairs, gazing down upon the assemblage, with a determined look upon her fair face, and a pair of six-shooters in her grasp.

With rapid steps Deadwood Dick hurried toward the spot, to ascertain what was the matter, for he knew that something unusual was transpiring.

He was soon near enough to ascertain that Frank Foster was at the head of the mob, and was evidently the leader.

"D'y hear?" Foster cried. "Come down and open the door, or we'll break it down for you, and save you the trouble."

"Just you try it, if you think it healthy, my lad!" Angel replied. "About the time you're smashin' in my door, I'll be smashin' your skull in, with a chunk of lead no bigger than a pea."

"Bah! don't talk to me that way, girl, or you'll be sorry for it. I'm boss of this town, I'll have you to know, and intend to have my own way about things. Suspicions are against you, hard, my girl, and the people want to know what it is you've got in your ranch that you're so afraid some one will see. That's what we're after, and what we are going to find out!"

"You are, eh?" the girl cried, her pretty face flushing, and her eyes flashing. "Well, go ahead and try on your little game and see how it will fit. I am all alone and have no one to defend me, but you'll learn before you get through with me, that Angel Arnot can defend herself! I've got twelve lives or deaths right in my grasp here, and a half a dozen more six-shooters within reach, and I'll put an electric shock into the system of every man, woman, or child that tries to enter my shanty, against my will. It is my shanty, and I'll protect it. Jackson Bird made me a present of it, long ere you and your foul rabble came here."

"Can't help that, young woman—every thing in this town now belongs to me," Foster declared. "Every body and soul here is my property; yourself included, therefore, I am to be obeyed, when I command. It will be to your advantage to obey. You are shadowed with suspicion. A hundred rumors concerning you, are afloat, none of which are flattering. You keep your shanty constantly locked, and allow no one to enter. What are we to think of this? Does it not indicate something wrong? Then, again, a few nights ago some of my men were passing your place when they heard peculiarities, and heard you singing as if hushing a baby to sleep. Now, what have you to say to that?"

"Nothing! If I were hushing twenty babies to sleep, instead of one, it is none of your business, or any one else's!" was the contemptuous reply. "I suppose you will all die, yet, out of sheer curiosity, if you do not root out my secret or secrets, but you are at perfect liberty to drop away as rapidly as may suit your convenience, as you'll not get possession of any of them, as long as I can pull a trigger. What secrets I may have, is none of your business. I am a respectable woman, and generally try to live a Christian life, unless I sin in the nature of my attire—but that is a matter of my own choice, and my own business. That is all the explanation I shall offer, and I simply request you to go away and attend to your own affairs. If you do not, I shall not beg of you—that a girl can be a girl, and a man too, so far as defending one's rights is concerned."

"Miss Arnot is right," Deadwood Dick said, pushing forward, "and it is no one's business but her own what her secrets may be; and I for one will spend my bullets in her defense."

"Ay! and so will I! The child shall not be hurt or disturbed, while there is a whole bone in my body!"

The speaker pushed forward, and stood beside Deadwood Dick.

He was a new-comer in the town, evidently, as all eyes were turned upon him with glances of surprise. And considering that he was quite a curiosity, it was no wonder.

In form he was bent and decrepit, and walked with tottering steps, supported by a gnarled cane.

His face was nearly all covered with a sweeping white beard and mustache and long white hair, only his nose, eyes, and a portion of his forehead being visible.

His beard in particular was of extreme length, reaching to his belt. His attire consisted of long-legged rubber hip-boots, met by roughly patched trousers and red woolen shirt belted at the waist, and worn through, at the elbows. A broad-rim slouch hat upon his head, and a heavy cavalry-pistol and knife in his belt completed his personal appearance, as well as could be described—and a very singular looking individual it made him, too.

And the way the old pilgrim stood up beside Deadwood Dick evidenced that, though aged, he was yet able and ready to strike for the right.

A fierce oath escaped Frank Foster, as he saw the pair of opponents.

"You'd better have the good sense not to meddle in this matter, Deadwood Dick!" the king cried, "for if you do, your famous career will come to an unpleasant end. And as for that old rack-a-bones beside you, I'll smash his head if I hear another peep from him."

"Oh! will you?" the old man cried, shaking his cane, threateningly. "Maybe you'd better come right over and try it! Maybe you think I'm some superannuated grave-yard—but you'll get tuk down on that. My handle's Seth Wickham, from Arizona, an' ef I am gittin' along in years, I can lick a hull crowd of such miserable skunks as you, any day."

"Hurrah! that's the talk for you, old covey! You've got sand, and so has Deadwood Dick. With such a pair of defenders, I ain't afraid but what I can lick the whole United States," Angel cried, from her perch. "How are you, Foster?"

"Curse you!" the villain cried. "I do not fear a trio, when I have a double score to back me. Once, and for the last time, I command you to come down and open that door. Refuse to comply with my request, and I will have this shanty torn down over your head. Then, curse you, we will discover the secret you guard so closely!"

"And once more, and for the last time, I deliberately refuse, and hurl my defiance at you!" the girl cried. "Move one foot to disturb me or my shanty, Frank Foster, and I'll send a bullet through your black heart."

And Deadwood Dick, cocking a pair of revolvers, added:

"On the whole, my dear Foster, you'd better drop the job just here, and back out with your life. Can't urge you at all, but your death is a matter of certainty if you proceed to execute your threat."

"Yes, you'd better close up like a jack-knife and wait for a better opportunity to prosecute your villainous little game, my dear king," Angel assured, sarcastically.

"And so I will!" Foster gritted, his dusky face nearly black with passion. "I'll bide my time, as you suggest. But, mind you, I'll yet know what secret you have housed in that shanty, that you are so afraid to disclose—yes, even if I have to wade through human blood to find out. And as for you, Sir Road-robber, although you have the liberty to remain in my town, look out that you don't wake up some morning and find yourself attending your own funeral. You will then realize that I have not forgotten the little event up at Big Bonanza."

And, turning upon his heel, he strode rapidly away. The crowd also dispersed, but Deadwood Dick waited until they were all gone, when he tipped his hat to Angel, and walked back down the gulch toward the Red-Eye.

The old pilgrim who had given his name as Seth Wickham, was standing outside the saloon, evidently awaiting the ex-road-agent's approach, for he motioned to him, with his gnarled cane.

"Well, uncle, what is it?" Dick demanded, with a smile. "We settled the hash, down yonder, didn't we?"

"We did, in truth, young man, and were partly the means of checking what might have been a bloody affray. I wish to thank you for taking sides with the girl, against such odds. I am interested by chance, in the child, and wish that no harm shall come to her?"

"No need to thank me, pardner, for I should have done the same, had it been a negro woman instead of a lovely white girl, who was being persecuted."

"That's right, my boy! There's the right metal in you, that's clear. But do you know who the girl is?"

"No—no more than that she calls herself Angel Arnot, dresses in male attire, and is as cool and independent a creature as I ever met."

"Ah! yes, so I should say. Do you suspect what her secret is?"

"I have had no cause to. But from what was said, to-day, by Foster, I should infer that there may possibly be a bundle of infancy in the cabin. Who it belongs to, however, is quite another question, which I shall not make it my business to inquire into."

"Nor I. I came here for another purpose. I came to find an old friend of my youth, whose name is Jackson Bird."

"Oh! you did?"

"Yes. I learned that he and his daughter live here, and came to visit them."

"Then I fear you will badly disappointed, old gent, for Bird himself is dead, and his daughter is not to be found!"

"Not to be found, sir? What do you mean?"

"Precisely what my words would seem to convey—Miss Lola Bird is not in Secret City, and I can't find any trace of her."

"But I understood by inquiry that she still lives in her father's shanty yonder, from a man I asked."

"Yes, there is a young woman there, but hang me if I believe it is the original."

"Ah! say you so? What do you think has become of the real Lola Bird, then?"

"Heaven only knows—I do not. My suspicions, however, are that Foster has had her secretly removed, and the impostor substituted."

"How did this Foster come to be here, and in possession of what I supposed belonged to my friend, Bird?" Wickham asked, in surprise.

"If you care to listen, I will tell you," Dick said, and he accordingly related what is already known.

"It is very strange," Wickham said, "and these villains from Denver shall not prosper. I can soon tell whether the woman at the shanty is Jackson Bird's daughter or not, if I can get a glimpse of her. I saw her, not a great many weeks since, and would not be apt to forget how she looks—oh, no!"

"She is beautiful then?"

"Ay! beautiful as a gazelle—as a fairy. Indeed, sir, I do not think there is another as beautiful a woman in the whole world."

"Well, then, I'll guarantee it is not the girl up at the shanty yonder. She is moderately

pretty, but I'll be hanged if she is what you make out."

"Doubtless it is an impostor. But for the sake of my friend Bird, I shall look into the matter. In his behalf, too, I must thank you gratefully for what you have done, and if Lola is ever found you may reasonably expect a handsome remuneration for your services, for they're a queer family, these Birds—a queer family."

And then the old fellow stumped along up the street, cane in hand, giving vent to some unintelligible muttering.

"Yes, they're a queer family," Deadwood Dick thought, "and you are as queer as the rest of them, old man. I wonder who and what you are? I had a notion a moment ago—but pshaw! it was ridiculous. And as for the really beautiful original Lola Bird, I have a desire to see her."

As he was cogitating thus a little boy approached and handed him an unsealed note, which on opening he found to be penned in small, neat chirography, and signed "Little Toothpick."

It ran as follows:

"If you wish to learn something of importance, come, to-night, to the first dead pine tree down the southern wagon trail, and call 'Toothpick.' I have something to communicate that may prove interesting to you."

CHAPTER XI. A STRANGE WARNING AND A GLIMPSE OF A HOURI.

THAT was all the note contained.

"I wonder what she can want of me, or can have to tell?" Dick muttered. "Must be something of importance, or she would not write. Well, I'll saunter that way, when darkness comes, and see what she has to say for herself."

Once during the forenoon he chanced to be passing in the neighborhood, when he heard his name called, and saw Angel Arnot beckoning to him from the steps of her shanty home, where she was sitting.

He accordingly approached her, and tipped his hat respectfully.

"You called to me, lady?"

"Yes, sir. I wished to extend you my sincere thanks for your braveness in taking my part, awhile ago. It was a favor I shall never forget."

"Don't speak of it, pray. I simply followed the dictates of duty in coming to your rescue."

"Then praised be your sense of honor!" the girl said. "But, there is something I am eager to ask you—what have you made out about Lola Bird?"

"Nothing, miss, except that she is gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, that is, the original. The girl up at the shanty, yonder, is not Lola, no more than am I."

"How do you know?"

"I do not know—I merely surmised."

"And rightly, too, I think. I have believed the same thing, ever since she has kept herself housed up. Oh! sir what can have become of Miss Lola? She was one of the loveliest, sweetest of girls, and we were the greatest of friends, until Frank Foster came here; then, I was refused admittance to the shanty."

"I didn't wait for a refusal," Deadwood Dick said, with a laugh.

Then, after a few more words, he went on down the street.

Frank Foster also received a warning, by mail, that day, which a teamster brought in from a New Mexico supply station.

It was penned in handsome chirography, and ran as follows:

"FRANK FOSTER, SIR: By the time you receive this, my spirit shall be on its way to Secret City, to haunt you from the position which belongs to another. All your villainy is known to me, and you shall be dealt with, accordingly. Take this warning, and restore my child to her rightful position, or at my will, within the next five days, a lake of mystery will be found where Secret City now stands, and your body and the bodies of your allies, may be looked for at the bottom. Remember! J. BIRD."

Foster was sitting in the Red-Eye saloon, at the time of reading the note; but immediately after reading it, he quitted the saloon, and sought his home, or, rather that of Jackson Bird. Entering, with a latch-key, he found himself in a plain sitting-room, neatly but not richly furnished.

The girl whom Deadwood Dick had interviewed, was seated in an easy-chair, engaged at sewing, but arose inquiringly, as she saw the ugly look upon Foster's face.

"Sit still," he commanded harshly. "I do not want you. Where is Mosher?"

"Up-stairs in his room, guzzling, as usual," the girl replied. "What's up, now?"

"Oh! the devil's to pay. If we don't play a strong hand, we'll lose the game, yet."

"What! after having it already won?"

"Ay! after seemingly having it already won. Read that."

He flung her the missive he had just received, with an angry jerk.

She took it and read it through without a change of countenance.

"You're a fool!" was her uncomplimentary decision, as she returned the paper. "It is only a get-up of Deadwood Dick, to frighten you off."

"Bah! I know better. This came from Denver, since Deadwood Dick left there. It is in Bird's own hand writing, too."

"But he is dead!"

"True. There's only one thing left, then."

"What is that?"

"Why, his spirit sent the letter."

The girl laughed, outright.

"There you are again—away off. If you want to let spirits rule your destiny, you are at liberty to do so—I don't care for any."

"If his spirit didn't direct it, he must be alive then!"

"Which is the safest thing to surmise. He threatens more like a live than a dead man, you see."

Foster paced about the room, his hands opening and shutting, convulsively, and his features expressive of a great rage.

The girl was perfectly self-possessed.

"I wouldn't give up the game now, if I had to sacrifice a hundred lives," he said. "I've cleared fifty thousand in dust and nuggets, since coming here, besides feeding the men on gold and whisky, literally, and your—Mosher has cleared an equal sum. To let go my grip on such a bonanza, now, would lay me out for an insane asylum. Call Mosher."

The girl obeyed, and soon returned, accompanied by Foster's brother in villainy.

He received the missive and read it, with a darkening countenance, and evilly gleaming eyes.

"Well, what's to be done?" he demanded.

"Curse me if I know. What do you make of it, anyhow?"

"That Bird is alive and coming back."

"Furies! it shall not be! It would be disastrous to us."

"Even so, but we have a choice left."

"Flight?"

"Yes."

"Never! I will play the game to the bitter end, before I'll yield."

"But will get beat, I'm afraid. Bird is a bad man to buck against. What did he mean about a lake?"

"Cursed if I know. Merely bosh, probably."

"I doubt that. He may know more than we do about the place."

"But, the men—do you not think they will hang by us?"

"No! They are all right now, but let Bird come back, and I'll wager my life every mother's son of them will go over to him."

"Then, what are we to do?"

"That must be a study, on our part. Scheme the very best we know how, must we, if we hope to carry through the game of gold we are playing, to a successful end. Lola Bird must die!"

"Oh! no!" Foster cried, firing up. "She is mine and shall be my bride, sooner or later!"

"But, hold! Not so fast. Perhaps you don't remember that there is a certain agreement between you and me."

"You refer to my promise to marry your daughter, eh?"

"Exactly!"

"Oh! well, as to that, it was merely a verbal promise, and is not binding. Maybe if I do not conclude to take the real bird, I'll take the impostor."

"Ah! that is your game, eh? Well, go ahead with it; but, mind you, if you do not keep your promises to my daughter, your life shall answer for it. We have assisted you in your infernal schemes, but shall hold up a bit, in order to see how this matter is coming out."

"Just as you please," Foster replied, with a sneer. "I am not afraid of what you can do, at all. I shall remain here as long as I see any chance for retaining the mastery—then, with the queen beauty of the world, I'll seek foreign parts, and live on the laurels I've won here. Ha! ha!"

And with a derisive laugh the villain left the cabin.

Deadwood Dick went to the first dead pine tree by the southern gulch trail, that night, just as dusk was merging into darkness.

Little Toothpick was not yet there, but soon came tripping along, failing in an attempt to whistle.

"It won't work," Dick declared, with a smile, as she came up. "Try though you may, you cannot make yourself seem less than a girl in boy's clothes."

"Oh! is that so? Well, if it suits you any better to know it, I am a girl in boy's clothes. There! there! don't faint—let me take your hat and get some water;" and the strange creature gave vent to a sarcastic laugh.

"You needn't mind," Dick assured, in return. "I never gets scared at scare-crows—or milliner's signs!"

"I'm glad of that. Also that you came here, for I wanted to talk with you."

"So you said in your note. So go ahead. My organs of hearing are in a prime condition."

"Well, to begin with, I want you to acknowledge that you are in love with that young woman down at yonder shanty, whom they call Angel Arnot."

"What! acknowledge what is untrue? I never thought of such a thing as being in love with her, girl."

"You swear to this?"

"If I deemed it requisite," was the reply.

"And will you swear that you love no one woman on the face of the earth—that is, as a lover should love?"

"Ay! there is one I am fond of," Deadwood Dick responded. "I do not know how it can matter to you, however."

"Yet it does matter, as you shall learn, to your satisfaction, hereafter. Who is this girl or woman you love—the said-to-be beautiful queen of the mines, eh?—the missing link, as it were?"

"No—far from being her. If you wish to know, there are but two women in all the world who care for me, or whom I love—a sister, up in Deadwood country, and a wild dare-devil of a girl, up about Leadville, whom I have known for several years."

"This latter personage is called Calamity Jane, eh?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Oh! her notoriety has a wide circulation, such as it is," sarcastically.

"Stop!" Dick cried, sternly. "Cast no slur upon her character, or you will make me forget that I am a man and you a weak woman. What the girl may have been concerns you not; a single misstep need not curse her for eternity. Please to understand in speaking of her that she is betrothed to become my wife, when I return to her, and is all in all to me."

"Oh!" Miss Toothpick said, her tone denoting doubt. Then, after a moment of silence, she added. "And you are confident that the fascination and influence of no other woman could draw you from this Calamity Jane?"

"Very positive."

"Ha! ha! you have not yet seen the beautiful Lola Bird. Once you feast your eyes on her magnificent beauty, you will quickly forget your rough Leadville sweetheart."

"No fear. My head is not easily turned, albeit I have been married several times. Have you seen this Lola Bird?"

"Ay! I saw her but an hour ago!"

"Ah! then at last I am on the right track. Quick, girl—you must tell me where to find her."

"Ah! must it. No, I think not. What do you want of her?"

"I want to restore her to her rights, here, in the place of the girl down at the Bird shanty, and I want to thwart Frank Foster and Mosher at their little game. I want to keep my promise to the dying father."

"Trouble yourself not. The girl is safely out of the place where Foster had her confined, and is in my charge. It is not necessary for you to take charge of her, for I shall place her in the care of him who joined you in interfering for the girl at the shanty. He will care for her, and already knows where she is, through me. But, if you wish to look at her, and will promise not to look at, or speak to her in a loving or admiring way, and will come back when I request, you shall see her."

"I cheerfully promise that," Dick responded, eagerly, "for I have a desire to look upon this girl. Not that the sight of her could attract me from my betrothed, as you seem to infer, but from a natural curiosity to see a woman who is pronounced so beautiful."

"Then permit me to blindfold you and bind your hands, and I shall be ready to conduct you to her."

Deadwood Dick was thoughtful a minute, but finally decided to acquiesce. She first secured his hands with a strong cord, and then doubled a handkerchief and tied it tightly around his head, over his eyes.

"There! now come on! Follow close at my heels," she said, when she had finished. "I guess you'll do."

She then led off, and he followed as she had directed. Remembering the positions they had stood in before starting, he knew their course lay down the gulch.

But after the first half hour's walk, he was unable to arrive at any decision what way they were going, except that they were ascending over a rough and rocky surface, among trees and brush.

A full two hours the tramp continued, and then they came to a halt in what Dick concluded was a cavern.

"Sh! make no noise!" Toothpick said. "She is asleep, and I do not wish to disturb her."

She then removed the handkerchief from before his eyes, and pointed ahead.

They were, indeed, in a small natural cavern, and just on the opposite side, in front of them, a young lady was reclining in a graceful position, upon a couch of skins.

One glimpse Deadwood Dick got of her—then Toothpick returned the bandage before his eyes, with a chuckle.

"Quite enough," she said, sarcastically—"I do not want to carry your heart back to Secret City in pieces. Was she not beautiful?"

"More beautiful than I ever imagined a human being could be," Deadwood Dick replied. "The sight of her could not help but stir the pulses of an anchorite."

"Ah! then Calamity Jane is nowhere in comparison, eh?"

"Calamity Jane is pretty—yonder girl beautiful. Calamity Jane is dear to me—yonder girl is nothing to me. Indeed, I would not care to own such a creature for a wife, for fear I should some time awake to find it all a terrible delusion and mockery. Come—let's go. I am satisfied."

In all his after life, Deadwood Dick could never describe the appearance of Lola Bird as he saw her—no language within his power was adequate. All the meaning that could possibly be associated with the word beautiful failed to touch the case, and all he could do was to remember the picture, a single glance of which had thrilled his very being with a sensation he had never before experienced.

Toothpick once more led the way, and they took their departure.

Not till they once more neared the town did she remove the bandage from his eyes, and the cords that bound his wrists.

"There. You may direct your own course," she announced. "You have seen the most beautiful woman in the world; now go your way in peace. But, look out for yourself! Extraordinary events are about to transpire, and I warn you, by direction of another, that the mountain top is safer than the gulch bottom."

Then, turning, she fled rapidly away into the darkness, leaving Deadwood Dick to pursue his way back to the town, which he did, in a strange frame of mind.

Matters were terminating evidently—but how, or by what means, was yet to be seen.

CHAPTER XII.

A GRAND DISSOLVING SCENE.

The next morning, there was great excitement in Secret City.

During the night there had been posted upon the door of every business establishment, and many of the dwellings, huge placards, bearing the following notice, pen printed in large letters, with red ink and black.

"WARNING!"

"To All Whom it May Concern.—Be it understood, that on this day, I, Jackson Bird, the original owner and founder of the mining camp known as Secret City, have returned from a journey into the grave and the mysterious eternity beyond, to find my home and possessions occupied by usurpers, and the charm of my past rule broken. Even my child, the handsomest woman in the world, hath been spirited away, and my servants have served the usurpers of my kingdom as maids. Therefore, with my heart inflamed with dissatisfaction, I have taken anger and offense, and decided that the days of Secret City shall be short. Take warning, then, and fly from the gulch, all you who would escape with life, for within the next twenty-four hours, the place where now exists the mining camp, shall be transformed into a boiling lake, in which the wicked shall find a foretaste of what there awaits them in the next world. For such shall be the vengeance of JACKSON BIRD, THE VAMPIRE."

Crowds collected to read these notices and

discuss their import; men grew excited, and cursed and swore; women cried in alarm.

Some scoffed at the idea; others were serious and doubtful.

On the whole, there was a general agitation, and all work was left to care for itself, while the miners stood here and there, in groups, and discussed the probabilities or improbabilities of the consummation of the threat.

Gradually the main crowd gathered around one burly black-whiskered individual who seemed to be a leader in public opinion.

"I tell ye what it is, feller-pilgrims, it's a dead open and shut," he argued, flourishing himself, from the top of an up-turned barrel. "Most of ye hev served under Jack Bird, an' know his as good's his word, every day in a week. He's put it right plain afore yer nose that he's goin' ter bu'st up matters, and sech pilgrims as don't skip, is a-goin' ter git bu'sted. Knowin' Birdy as I do, I'm goin' ter sing my songs no more but seek a healthier locality."

"Just my fix, exactly," another miner agreed. "I'm going to pull out at once, fer when Jack Bird sez a thing ye can count that et's goin' ter come—an' I alius did say he was leagued with the devil—he an' his purty daughter, too."

This opinion seemed prevalent.

Foster and Mosher moved about among the men, and urged them to go to work and pay no attention to what they called the "malicious device of some envious person."

But all their talking proved unavailing, for the men were, as a rule, disposed to act according to their own feelings in the matter.

And when Morgan, the leading spirit among them, saddled and packed his horse, and rode away out of town, it was the signal for some twenty others to follow his example, during the course of the day.

The few who remained were composed of the new-comers of the rougher and bolder class, who were thoroughly allied to Foster's rule. Even they refused to work, and stood around doubtfully.

Deadwood Dick watched matters, quietly, until the sun began to sink below the horizon; then he left the Red-Eye saloon, and started to leave the town as he had no desire longer to remain.

As he was passing Angel Arnot's shanty she came out and closed the door behind her.

"Are you quitting the gulch?" she queried, eagerly.

"Yes. I thought it best to take the warning, if it was meant for me," he replied.

"You are wise. I bid you good-by, then, if I should not see you again."

"What! are you going to remain?"

"No! but I shall wait till after dark. Come in and see my baby girl!"

"Your baby?"

"Oh! yes; that was the secret I had housed up," and with a laugh she led the way into the shanty.

A three-months old babe was sleeping peacefully in its little crib, and Dick noted that it looked like Angel Arnot.

"I'll confide my secret to you," she said. "I am Jackson Bird's wife. We have been married a year, but a short time after our marriage, our certificate was lost. Lola would not believe that we were legally married, until we could produce the certificate. My husband, as you may have surmised, is at times very strange. Some say he is crazy—but he is ever good to those he loves. In one of his wild spells, he lost the certificate, and it happened before we had announced our legal union. The minister died soon after our marriage, and so you see we were without the proof necessary to convince any one of our marriage. Hoping the certificate might be found, sooner or later, we decided to keep the matter a secret and live apart, until it was found. Three months ago my babe was born, without any acknowledged father. Not knowing what else to do, I kept the matter a secret, and you are the second person I have ever told of it. But thank Heaven, I am now out of the fog of suspicion. The certificate was found and returned to me last night. Ah!—listen!"

Loud yells, curses and pistol shots were heard outside, together with horses' footfalls. Dick sprang to the door, followed by Angel.

Down the street upon horseback, and the horse running at that, rushed the old white-beard, Wickham!

In the rear followed what was left of Secret City's population, howling and yelling, and firing at the fleeing stranger.

"Stop him! stop him, dead or alive!" Frank Foster cried. "It is Bird, the Vampire. Five

hundred dollars to the man who takes him, dead, or alive!"

"That man Jackson Bird?" Deadwood Dick asked, turning to Angel.

"Yes, that is him. Ha! ha! they waste their bullets on him, you may rest assured. Bullets don't go through padded buffalo-skins."

On—dashed Bird, and the crowd followed determinedly, but could not effect a capture.

After they had gone by, Angel turned to Dick.

"You had better go now, or they may return and seek to wreak vengeance on you."

"Bah! I fear them not. I prefer to remain, and see that they offer you no molestation."

He had not long to wait.

They soon returned and passed by, without even looking at the shanty.

Soon after Deadwood Dick took his departure, and left the town.

As he arrived at the outskirts, he met McKandlass and Old Scowler, both of whom greeted him with a friendly hand-shake.

"We was just coming to see you," the former said. "We wanted to ax you if you could get along without us."

"Ah! what now? Getting tired of leading a good life?"

"Not by a long shot, old boy. On the contrary, we've found it a hanged sight more comfortable, an' decided ter pull out fer the East, where we've both got families w'ot we've been away from for years. So ef ye'll let us out, we'll pull fer the East an' jine them w'ot's been waitin' fer us a long time."

"Are you in earnest, McKandlass?—do you really contemplate reform?" Dick asked, earnestly.

"Shoot me ef we don't mean that same, Cap, an' we thank you, from the souls o' our boots, fer startin' us in the right path. We be brothers, me an' Scowler, an' we've roughed it fer a heap long time, an' I spect we've got more black stripes on the Big Book than that's ha'ns on our heads. But, then, we've concluded since you induced us to ro straight, that mebbe by sincere repentance an' livin' as we orter, we will stand a small show, in the hereafter, an' so we're goin' ter brush up an' let no future sin darken our already dark prospects."

"And may God strengthen you in your purpose, my friends," Dick said, grasping them cordially by the hand, a moisture in his eyes. "You are free to go, and if I have been the cause of your proposed reformation, I have my reward, amply, in the knowledge, that in my wild career, I have at least been instrumental in doing some good. Go, and may the blessings and encouragement of all honest men be with you. But hold! have you money?"

"Not much, Cap—only about a hundred, apiece."

"That is insufficient to get you East, to say nothing about starting you in an honest way. I have some queer little golden rules of my own, you see, and among them is one, that it's harder for a man to break from villainy into an honest existence without cash, than it is for aburro to be made to understand that gravel is shelled corn. Here!"—and the ex-road-prince took a pouch of coin from his pocket. "I will give you a little lift. I have a small mine, up near Leadville, that turns out a few hundred a month, which I have no particular use for. There are twenty twenty-dollar gold pieces in this pouch, and they are yours. Take them, and leave this gulch at once, for it is not safe here."

"May God bless you, Deadwood Dick," McKandlass said, in a choked voice. "We shall never forget you."

Then, they turned and walked down the gulch, and disappeared from view.

Dick took an opposite course, and ascended the mountain.

Night closed in dark and cloudy.

A storm was brewing, the fact being evident by the rumbling muttering of thunder along the horizon.

Half-way up the mountain Deadwood Dick stopped, and seated himself upon a rock, where he could overlook the town below, with its few gleaming lights glowing like stars in a midnight sky.

Louder grew the rumbling along the horizon—darker grew the night; the storm was gathering volume before breaking. The occasional glares of lightning lit up the night, vividly, causing a spectral effect upon the rugged face of nature.

For an hour Deadwood Dick sat gazing down into the dark valley, then a strange drowsiness came over him, and he dropped asleep.

When he awoke, it was with a start.

The earth and rock in under him shook as by

an earthquake, and there was a report like a hundred cannons. In vain he struggled to move, but found that he was bound hand and foot, and blindfolded.

In astonishment he waited the result of—he knew not what.

Half an hour passed; then to his joy he heard footsteps approaching. Be they those of friend or foe, they had a welcome sound to him.

Later came an exclamation, as some person approached, and his bonds were cut and the bandage torn from before his eyes.

In surprise he beheld Little Toothpick standing before him.

"What! you? How did you find me?"

"By mere chance. Who bound you and left you here?"

"I came here myself, and fell asleep. When I awoke, I was as you found me. What noise was that awhile ago?"

"The bottom of the gulch has all been blown out by a terrific explosion. It was a terrible sight, the earth and flames nearly reaching to the sky."

"Ah! it was then the work of Jackson Bird?"

"Yes, even so. But see—here lies a paper some one has left. What is it?"

Dick received it, but could make nothing out. He accordingly gathered a few dry fagots, for had not yet rained, and ignited them.

By the light from the fire, he was enabled to decipher the writing.

It ran as follows:

"DEADWOOD DICK, Sir: By the time you will have regained your liberty, and perused this, all that was is no more—I mean where stood the town of Secret City. I have blown up the place, and had my vengeance. Nothing now remains but a sheet of water. About a year ago I made a discovery that directly beneath the town, in under the ground, was a great sheet of water. By research I learned that this underground lake was fed by an underground stream which flowed through a mountain cave. Experiment taught me that the ground was about a foot above the water, leaving a vacuum or space.

"The surface of the water was oily, and in this vacuum, between the water and the earth, a great volume of gas collected, some of which found exit from a seam in the opposite mountains. Yesterday evening I plugged this vein or seam up, and laid a train of powder to the mountain cave, which is also filled with this natural gas. To-night, ere you receive this, I shall have fired the powder. It will communicate with and fire the gas in the cave. The fire will follow the oil and gas in under ground, and a terrible explosion will follow, and death to those who failed to heed the warning of Jackson Bird. As for yourself, and the person called Little Toothpick, we heartily thank you for what you have done for us—you in particular, having shown an honest hand; and in reward for your services you will find, behind the rock on which you fell asleep, a bag of golden nuggets, which is yours to take and keep, being a gift from my wife and daughter—for we have plenty more. In a canoe laden with the gold of Secret City, we sail across the lake, and plunge deeper into the wilderness, lost to the world, forever and ever.

"JACKSON BIRD."

As he finished reading, Dick turned to—not Little Toothpick, the masked, but to Calamity Jane, the unmasked, who stood regarding him with a roguish smile.

"Yes, it's me," she said, in answer to his exclamation of astonishment. "I followed you, to test your loyalty to me, and am satisfied. Come, here is the bag of nuggets—a good thirty pounds or more. Let's leave this God-forsaken spot, for you took a hand in a game of gold, and have made a hit by getting the joker. Lest your luck forsake you, let's go at once."

"I am willing," Dick said, embracing her. "Come."

Another sunrise found them far from the wild spot, which had lived and expired at the will of Jackson Bird, the so-called vampire.

Side by side they rode through the wilderness, bound for other wild and exciting scenes of the mighty West.

THE END.

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